THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

NOW 35c JULY

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Hammerpond Bank Burglary
by H. G. WELLS

Murder Gathers Momentum
by CORNELL WOOLRICH

The Crooked Coronet
by MICHAEL ARLEN

The Man Who Was Missing
by MIGNON G. EBERHART

McQuestion's Murder Trail
by ERNEST HAYCOX

THE TALENTED HUSBAND
A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

Although Cornell Woolrich's MURDER GATHERS MOMENTUM is modern enough, I get a rather nostalgic feeling from the line-up of stories featured on this issue's cover.

Not that I have any regrets about bringing together such a quorum of old-timers. In the urgent anxiety which some readers feel to keep up with the latest stories, it is too easy to forget that some great writing was being done before many of you had even learned to read.

It is one of the real pleasures and privileges of a magazine like this to resurrect a few collector's items which most of you, I'm fairly sure, missed when they were new and might never manage to get back and find without our help.

The first great name is that of H. G. Wells, whose WAR OF THE WORLDS was recently revived for you in Technicolor, and who is probably much better known for this today than for his many other more "serious" (literary snob language for "less imaginative") novels. Even less known, is the fact that Mr. Wells also experimented with the crime story. But you will know it, after THE HAMMERPOND PARK BURGLARY.

When you and I were young, kiddies, a certain Michael Arlen topped the best-seller lists with a novel called THE GREEN HAT, which was considered highly daring in those days because it touched on a slight case of syphilis. Probably THE GREEN HAT would seem very old hat to a generation of Kinsey students. But Mr. Arlen also was versatile enough to switch to a more drawing-room type of problem, as you will see in THE CROOKED CORONET.

It may seem ungallant to call a lady an old-timer, but Mignon G. Eberhart has certainly been writing longer than I have. And I am especially fond of her for being one of the few women writers to develop a good female sleuth, which should be a natural for a woman writer, and yet so few of them have done it. Here is her character Susan Dare in THE MAN WAS MISSING.

With all this back-harking going on, it seems only fitting that my own contribution—THE TALENTED HUSBAND—should take the Saint back to England for the first story in sixteen years, to horn in on the last case of his old adversary Chief Inspector Claude Eustace Teal of Scotland Yard, with whom Simon Templar crossed many a sword before some of you could even cross a room.

But damn it, I don't *feel* that old.

Leslie Charteris

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MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY FOR THE ISSUES YOU HAVE MISSED

the talented husband

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Inspector Teal of Scotland Yard just had to retire in triumph. If only Templar would stumble over the skeletons in the killer's closet.

THE YOUNG MAN at Hanworth was very impersonal, very polite. He looked up from the passport and said: "Oh, yes. Mr. Templar. Would you step this way, please, sir?"

Simon Templar followed him obligingly from the reception room in which the other passengers from the plane were being processed. The most respectable citizen receiving an invitation like that, no matter how courteously phrased, could have experienced a sensation of vacuum in the stomach. But to Simon such attention at any port of entry had become almost as routine as a request for his vaccination certificate.

For the days when harassed police officers and apprehensive malefactors, not to mention several million happily fascinated readers of headlines, had known him only by the name of The Saint were so far behind as to be almost in the province of archaeologists. And of all the countries on earth which had enjoyed the ambiguous benediction of his presence, England, which had been privileged to be the first to feel the full impact of his outlawry, would probably be the last to forget him.

THE SAINT IS HERE AGAIN IN A NEW MYSTERY THRILLER, WITH HIS HALO TILTED JUST AS EXUBERANTLY AS EVER!

Copyright, 1954, by Leslie Charteris

The Saint was very pleasantly unperturbed by the prospect. In fact, he had been looking forward to it for a long time. And as he strolled into the small office to which he was escorted, and the young man went out again and quietly closed the door, he knew that all his optimism had been justified and that this visit would at least begins as beautifully as he had dared to hope.

He gazed across at the cherubic round face of the man who sat there behind the desk disrobing a stick of chewing gum, and his eyes danced like laughing steel.

"Claud Eustace Teal," he breathed ecstatically. "My own dream dog. I mean bloodhound. Have you wondered too if we should ever meet again?"

"Good morning, Saint," Chief Inspector Teal said primly. "What brings you back here?"

"Haven't you heard? I'm playing two weeks at the Palladium."

Mr. Teal fought for the somnolent authority in his stare. He had fought for it stubbornly ever since he had started waiting for the plane to land, as he had not had to do for many relatively peaceful years. Even five years of war, which had included the fondest ministrations of the Luftwaffe, now seemed in retrospect like a mere ripple in the long interlude of tranquillity with which he had been favored since he last had to cope with the Saint.

Now that vacation in Nirvana might have lasted no longer than since yesterday. He saw the Saint exactly as he had remembered him in nightmares, outrageously looking not a day older, the tall lean figure just a sinewy and debonair, poised with the same insolently vivid grace, the tanned pirate's face just as keen and reckless. And it was as if the years between had passed over like a flight of birds.

"I'm not doing this because I want to," Teal said heavily. "The sooner we get the formalities done, the sooner you can be on your way. When someone like you comes back here, we have to ask why."

"All right, Claud. I really came back on account of you."

"I said—"

"But I did. Honestly."

"Why me?"

"I heard you were going to retire."

Mr. Teal's molars settled into his spearmint like anchors into a bed of sustaining guck. He said, with magnificent stolidity: "How did you manage to hear that?"

"There was a piece in *Time*, recently, about Scotland Yard. Among some thumbnail sketches of the incumbent hierarchy of beefy brains, your name was mentioned as one of the old-timers shortly to be moved over to the pension list. It's true, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"They gave you a fine record. All your most celebrated suc-

cesses. The only big thing they didn't mention, for some reason, was how you never succeeded in catching me. But I suppose you gave them the information." Simon surveyed him with affectionate appraisal. "You certainly look wonderful, for an old man, Claud. I'd certainly have recognized you anywhere. The hair little thinner, perhaps. The jowls a little fuller. The stomach—"

"Just for once," Teal said grimly, "let's leave my stomach out of this."

"By all means," said the Saint generously. "And it'll leave a lot of room. After all, how much more convex can a thing be than convex?"

Like a man struggling to hold down a paroxysm of seasickness, Chief Inspector Teal felt all the frustrated bitterness of the old days welling up in him again, all the hideous futility of a score of humiliations brought on by his dutiful efforts to put that impudent Robin Hood behind the bars where every law said that he belonged; and enriching it was the gall of a hundred interviews such as this, in each one of which he had not only been thwarted but made farcically ridiculous.

He never could understand how it happened. It was as if the Saint could actually put some kind of Indian sign on him, but it was a black magic that never failed. Normally a man, of no small presence and dignity, impressive to his subordinates and respected even by the underworld, Mr. Teal could be reduced by a few minutes of the Saint's peculiar brand of baiting to the borders of screaming imbecility.

But now he would not, he must not, let it happen again . . .

"Yes, I'm retiring," he said doggedly. "Next week. And since you've been away this long, you could have stayed away just a few days longer."

"But I had to be in on your last performance, Claud. And as soon as you heard I was on this passenger list, bless your old fallen arches, you hurried out here to welcome me and—"

"And tell you, whatever you're thinking of doing here, if you know what's good for you, you'll put it off for at least a week!"

The speech, which had a certain breathlessness built right into it, ended on something like a yelp. Teal had not meant it to. He had meant to speak firmly and masterfully; but somehow it had not come out like that.

"You yelped," said the Saint.

"I did not!" Teal stopped, and cleared his throat with a violence that almost choked him. "I'm just warning you to behave yourself, and we'll let bygones be bygones. Is that clear?"

"Of course," said the Saint earnestly. "In fact, just to prove how forgiving I am, I'm only here to make sure that your career ends in a blaze of glory. I'm

going to make sure that you solve your last case—even if I have to do it for you."

"I don't need your help."

"Why, is it going that well?"

"Quite satisfactorily, thank you."

"You've got the goods on him already?"

"Is isn't my business to get the goods on anyone," Teal said ponderously. "Just the evidence, if there has been a crime."

"But you're reasonably sure the guy is guilty?"

"I think so. But proving it is another matter. These Bluebeards are pretty tricky to . . . But what the devil," Teal blared suddenly, "do you know about the case?"

"Nothing," said the Saint blandly. "Except what you're telling me."

The detective glared at him suspiciously. "I don't believe you."

"You pain me, Claud. Do you think I'm a liar?"

"I've known it for twenty years," Teal said hotly. "And let me tell you something else. You're not coming back and getting away with any more of your private acts of what you call justice. If anything happens to Clarron, I'll know damn well who—"

"Clarron?"

"Or Smith, or Jones, or Tom, or Dick, or Harry!" shouted Teal, and knew just how lame a recovery he had made so far.

Simon lighted a cigarette. "Clarron," he murmured. "Well, well. Where is he living right now?"

"I suppose you want me to believe you don't know that, too."

"Once again," said the Saint reproachfully, "a more sensitive soul might take offense at your delicate insinuations that I fib."

Mr. Teal made a last frantic clutch at a self-possession which had already assumed some of the qualities of a buttered eel. "Just let me tell you," he said in a labored voice, "that if I catch you going anywhere near Maidenhead—"

"Maidenhead?" mused the Saint. "A charming spot. I've been wanting to see it again for years. And somebody told me only the other day that an old pal of mine is now running the famous pub there on the river. As a matter of fact, that's one of the first places I was planning to visit. I might even drive straight out there, and skip London entirely."

"If you do," yammered Teal apoplectically, "I'll—" His voice strangled incoherently as the Saint's mocking brows lifted over clear cerulean eyes.

"What will you do, Claud? It's still a free country, isn't it? Maidenhead hasn't been made a Forbidden City. Hundreds of tourists go there without being arrested. I don't see why you

should pick on me . . . I don't even see why you should keep me here any longer, if you feel so unfriendly. So may I get my bag from the Customs and breeze along?"

The Saint hitched himself lazily off the corner of the desk where he had rested one hip for a while. "But if you do think of some crime to charge me with, I hope you'll run down and make the pinch yourself. It'll give the natives a laugh. You'll find me at Skindle's."

II

"You must forgive the Latin kind of welcome," Giulio Trapani said, releasing Simon from an uninhibited bear-hug. "But it is so good to see you again!"

"It's good to see you," said the Saint. "And as a contrast with the Scotland Yard treatment I got at the airport, I wouldn't care if you kissed me."

He sat up at the bar, and Trapani went behind it and brushed the bartender aside.

"I mix it myself," he said ebulliently. "Whatever you'd like."

"At this hour, just a pint from the barrel—warm, flat, nourishing, and British. I was thinking about it all the way over on the plane. It may be an acquired taste, but it's still the only beer in the world that tastes like a meal."

"It still isn't the same as before the War," Trapani said, setting a tankard before him. "But this is the best you can get."

"Nothing is ever the same, after enough years," said the Saint.

He drank deeply and contentedly. The brew still tasted good without its forebears near enough for easy comparison.

"You've made a change too," he said. "This is a lot more pub than the old Bell at Hurley."

"Skindle's, Mr. Templar, is a Hotel."

"A good hotel should also be a good pub."

"I try to make it a good pub too—with trimmings."

Simon nodded, and glanced out for a moment over the river. It was still early in the season, but it was one of those warm sunny days of almost unbelievable balminess which the climate of Britain can produce as capriciously as it will inevitably snatch them back under a mantle of rain, cold, or fog. And on that pleasant reach of the Thames the skiffs and punts were moving up and down, drifting with their own portable radio or phonograph music or propelled by vigorous and slightly exhibitionistic young males, with girls in bathing suits or print dresses reclining on gay cushions as luxuriously as any Cleopatra on the Nile (exactly as they had done when he was last there. He thought that some things like that might survive all changes).

A girl came in from the river side, in shorts, giving away legs that men would have spent money to see across a row of footlights, with dark rumpled hair and the face of a thoughtful pixie; and the Saint turned away again with some relutance.

"And you," Trapani was saying eagerly. "How is everything? You didn't really have any trouble, of course?"

"Not really."

"And you're going to relax here and have a good time. I'm so glad that you heard about me and came here. Is there anything you want, anything I can do? You only have to ask me."

Simon put down his tankard and looked up from it speculatively. "Well, Giulio, since you mention it—would you happen to know anyone living around here by the name of Clarron?"

"Why, yes. Mr. Reginald Clarron. I think his house is on the river, quite near here. I don't know him personally, but I've heard of him."

Trapani flashed a quick look around the bar. It might have been nothing but the automatic vigilance of a professional host, but Simon noticed it. There were not many customers just then—the girl with the legs who had just come in, who was being served a Martini, two young men in flannels who were drinking Pimm's Cups, a thin elderly man in a dark suit with the anxious air of a traveling salesman, and a stout, middle-aged woman in a respectable high-necked long-sleeved black dress, with a cupola of carroty hair capped with a pie-dish straw hat trimmed with some kind of artificial fruit salad, who was sipping a glass of port in the corner. She looked, Simon thought, like the prototype of every comic housekeeper he had ever seen in vaudeville.

"What sort of a guy is he?" Simon asked.

"A very distinguished-looking gentleman. Very chairming, I've heard. But he doesn't go out much. His wife is an invalid. She had a terrible accident a few months ago. But if you know them, I expect you heard about it."

"Just how did it happen?" Simon evaded innocently.

"They were out shooting together. He put down his gun to help her over a fence, and it went off and shot her. His own gun. They saved her life, but her spine was permanently injured. Of course, he can never forget it. He spends all his time with her."

Trapani had lowered his voice discreetly, and his glance flicked away again for a moment. He leaned over and explained in an undertone: "That woman in the corner is their housekeeper."

Her ears must have been abnormally sharp, or perhaps it was not too hard to interpret the fur-

tive glance and the lowered voice, but the woman allowed no doubt that she had taken in the whole conversation.

"Indade I am," she called out in a rich cheerful brogue. "And a sweeter master an' mistress I niver worked for. Jist as devoted as if they were on their honeymoon, an' her so patient and forgiving, an' himself eatin' his heart out, poor man, with an awful thing like that on his conscience. Begorra, if anyone says a word against him, they'll be answerin' for it to me."

"I've never heard one, Mrs. Jafferty," Trapani assured her hastily.

"Sure an' it'd bring tears to the eyes of a potato to see them together, with himself waitin' on her hand an' foot, readin' to her or playin' cards with her or whativer she has a mind for, an' bringin' flowers from the garden ivery day."

She squeezed herself cumbrously out from behind the little table, picked up a market bag that bulged as bountifully as her figure, and waddled across towards the Saint.

"An' why would you be askin' about them, sorr—if I may be so bold?"

"A friend of mine said I should look them up, if I happened to be around here," Simon answered.

He had to think quickly, for this was a little sooner than he had expected to need a ready answer. And her eyes were very sharp and inquisitive.

"I'm on me way home now, sorr, with a bite for their dinner. If you'd be tellin' me the name, I could tell them what to look forward to."

"This was a friend of Mr. Clarron's former wife. He mightn't even remember her. A Mrs. Brown."

"From America, maybe? Mr. Clarron's late wife was an American lady, they tell me."

"Yes," said the Saint gratefully. "From New York."

"And your name, sorr, in case you should be callin'"

"This is Mr. Templar, Mrs. Jafferty," Trapani said.

Simon gazed at him gloomily.

"I'll tell him you were askin'," Mrs. Jafferty said. "And good day to ye, gentlemen."

She hitched up her bag of groceries and bustled busily out.

"I'm sorry," Trapani said. "Did I do wrong? You hadn't told me you wanted to be incognito."

"Forget it," said the Saint. "I hadn't had a chance to. It's not your fault."

He empited his mug and put it down, and Trapani picked it up.

"Another? Or do you feel like some lunch?"

"Mr. Templar is having lunch with me," said the girl with the legs.

Simon Templar blinked. He turned, with a cigarette between his lips and his lighter halted in mid-air. Finally, he managed to light it.

"If you say so," he murmured. "And if Giulio will excuse me."

"I excuse you and congratulate you," Trapani beamed.

The girl drained her cocktail and came over, putting out her hand as the Saint stood up. "I'm Adrienne Halberd," she said.

"I'd never have recognized you."

She laughed. "That may take some explaining. But do you mind if I rush you off? I'm expecting a phone call at home, and I've got to get back for it."

"I'll see you later," Simon told Trapani.

She was on her way to the other door, and he followed her. "I walked over," she said, as they came out in front of the hotel. "But I expect you've got a car."

"That rented job over there."

They got in; and she said, pointing, "That way, to the right, and I'll tell you where to turn."

Simon spun the wheel and relaxed, letting cigarette smoke float from mildly amused lips. "And now that we're alone," he said calmly, "may I ask you any questions. Or do we go on playing blindfold chess?"

"All of a sudden? You didn't argue when I practically kidnapped you."

"I never argue with legs like yours, darling. But sometimes I ask questions."

"You *are* the Saint, aren't you?"

"True. But my mind-reading gifts have been slightly exaggerated."

"You were asking about Reggie Clarron."

"Which should prove that I didn't know much about him."

"You knew he'd been married before."

"An inspired guess. A fat friend of mine happened to tag the name 'Bluebeard' on him, rather carelessly, just a few hours ago. Bluebeards, if you remember, don't get much of a rating with only one wife. It was worth taking a chance on."

"All right," she said. "I took a chance on you. He's only had two so far, I think; but you might help to nail him before he finally manages to kill the third. Not to mention saving the prospective fourth."

The Saint raised his eyebrows. "He has one picked out already?"

"Me," said the girl.

III

The dining alcove was one corner of the living room of her cottage, sharing the row of gaily curtained windows that looked out over the green lawn that sloped down to the river bank. They sat there over some excellent cold roast beef and salad and

mustard pickles, and the Saint sipped a tall glass of Guinness.

"He isn't a mystery man at all, Adrienne Halberd said. "That's what makes it so difficult."

"One of those open-book boys?" said the Saint.

"Absolutely. He went to a good school, where he didn't get into any particular trouble. Then he became an actor. He never made any hit, but he managed to make a living. He didn't care much what he did, as long as it was something theatrical. He got married the first time when he was twenty-five. He and his wife were both in the chorus of some revue. Later on they joined up with one of those troupes that used to play on the piers at the seaside in the summer. He was about thirty when she got drowned in a boating accident."

"Why did he wait that long?"

"It wasn't so long after she'd inherited some money from an uncle in Australia; and right on top of that they'd taken out mutual insurance policies."

"So then he became a capitalist."

"He still wasn't so awfully rich, but he moved up a notch. He helped to produce some shows in London, which were mostly flops. But he always got other people to invest with him, so his own money lasted longer than you'd think. He was getting a bit short, though, when he married his second, very innocent wife."

"The American?"

"Yes. That was after the War, when the tourists started coming over again. He married her, and they went to America together—after taking out insurance policies for each other. Six months later she was electrocuted. She was lying in the bath listening to a small radio, apparently, and it fell in."

"Just doing his bit to improve Britain's dollar balance," Simon remarked.

"Then it was the same story all over again—a night club, plays, a film company that never produced anything, and some other business schemes. Never anything crooked that you could put your finger on, except that his partners somehow always lost more money than he did. And about a year ago he married the present Mrs. Clarron."

"He sounds like a real cagey operator. At least, until that shooting accident misfired—if we should use the expression."

She nodded. "That was when the Southshire Insurance Company got very interested, as I told you. Being stuck three times in a row was a bit too much. Of course it *could* all be coincidence, but it had to be looked into."

Simon regarded her appreciatively. "They're not so stupid. I'd have taken a long time to spot you as a detective."

"It's a new discovery," she said spiritedly. "They found out that investigators could do a lot more if they didn't look like investigators, and somebody told them that a woman with brains isn't obliged to look like a hippopotamus."

He grinned. "I must tell Teal that the same could apply to policemen," he said. "What does he think about you butting in—or doesn't he know?"

"Oh, he knows all right, and he disapproves strongly. But there's nothing he can do about it. I told him that the insurance company stood to lose ten thousand pounds if Clarron managed to get away with killing another wife, and they couldn't afford to bet that much on Scotland Yard being smart enough to stop him."

Simon chuckled aloud. "I'm beginning to think of you as a soul-mate. But you still haven't told me how you visualize me in this set-up."

"In rather the same way," she said seriously. "I know it'll sound ridiculous, but I've always been your wildest fan. I started reading about you in my teens, and idolizing you in a silly way. I can't have altogether grown out of it. When I heard you asking about Clarron in Skindle's, and heard your name, it just hit me like a mad flash of inspiration. I'd give anything to get even with Teal for the patronizing way he's talked to me, and I knew you'd sympathize with that, and besides, this case would be a great big feather in my cap. That is—if we could get together . . ."

The Saint finished his plate and leaned back. The tranquil glow that he felt was fueled by more subtle calories than a good meal satisfyingly washed down. For his luck, it seemed, was as unchangingly blessed as ever. He had been in England, only a few hours, and already the old merry-go-round was rolling at full throttle in his honor. A problem, a pretty girl, and Chief Inspector Teal to bedevil. What more had he ever asked? It was as if he had never been away.

"You just got yourself soul-hitched, darling," he said. "Now what's the music you think we might make together?"

"I've told you everything I know, for a start. But what do *you* know?"

"Not another thing. The worthy watchdogs of the Yard undoubtedly spotted my name in a routine check for incoming undesirables, and Teal came huffing out to the airport to warn me to keep my nose clean. I knew that Teal had to be working on some case, even if he is retiring; and whatever it was, I figured I could do a memorable job of lousing it up for him."

"You mean you didn't know about Clarron before?"

"Teal took it for granted that I did, and let out the name. Then

I needled him some more, and he mentioned Maidenhead. That was plenty for me to start on."

She stared at him with sober brown eyes, and bit her lip. "That's rather disappointing."

"I've done plenty with less, in my time," he said cheerfully. "But you're still holding something back. What was that about you being the next victim?"

"Oh. Yes. You see, I've got to know him quite well. He thinks I'm a young widow with money."

"And that you might be available if only he were free?"

"That's right. That's why I talked the insurance company into letting me rent this cottage, to make it easy. It's right next door to his house."

The Saint raised his eyebrows over the cigarette he was lighting.

He got up and stood at the window. Looking out at an angle, he still could not see the other house. He recalled that when they arrived at the cottage he had not clearly seen an adjoining house, since the front of the cottage was well screened with trees; but in the back only a low hedge separated the lawns that went down to the river.

"I've done more than that," Adrienne said. "Once I got him over here, and pretended to be a bit tight, and more than hinted that when my imaginary husband was ill with pneumonia I'd helped to make sure that he didn't get over it."

"The soul-mate approach again?"

"It was a trick I read about in a mystery story. But it didn't work on him. He's too—what did you call it?—cagey, even to fall for that."

A man had come into sight on the next lawn, at first inspecting a stretch of hedge with the diagnostic eye of an amateur gardener, then turning and looking back over it towards the cottage. Then he walked down a little farther and came through an opening in it.

"We'd better hurry up and think of a new approach that includes me," said the Saint. "Lover Boy is coming to call."

IV

Mr. Reginald Clarron's failure to achieve any notable success on the stage was only due, he would always be convinced, to the cloddish stupidity of the public. About his own outstanding talents he had no doubt whatsoever. Where lesser thespians played their parts for a couple of hours behind the footlights, he could sustain his for twenty-four hours a day, with no help from a script, and sell them to an audience that did not have to be pre-conditioned by the atmosphere of a theater.

He prided himself on having every flicker of expression and

every inflection of voice under conscious control at every moment. It would be trite to observe that he would have made a formidable poker player: he already was.

He had a passably good-looking face without a single distinctive feature, but like a good showman he applied distinction to it with the full cut of his artistically long but carefully brushed gray hair and a pair of glasses with extra heavy black frames, so that a recognizable caricature might have been made of those two items alone, with no face shown at all.

His figure, at least as far as it was ever displayed to the public, was most commendable for a man of fifty-five; and only a certain fleshiness around the chin betrayed a tendency to embonpoint which skillful tailoring was able to conceal elsewhere.

He had not batted an eyelid when he heard the name Templar, although instinct told him that there was only likely to be one Templar who might be making inquiries about him. He still could not imagine how that Templar could have become interested in him, but he had read enough to believe that the Saint's nose for undetected crime verged on the supernatural.

Nevertheless, he was not going to let himself be stampeded by the uncomfortable fact, which he believed was the main reason why less astute malefeasors had been the Saint's easy prey.

"I can't imagine what the man can be up to," he told his wife, boldly, for he was clever enough never to create complications for himself with lies or evasions that were not strictly necessary. "I'm quite sure that poor Frances never mentioned a friend called Mrs. Brown. The very name is an obvious subterfuge."

"I do hope he isn't after my jewels," Mrs. Clarron said.

She touched the sapphire pendant that showed in the open neck of her bed jacket, with fingers glittering with diamond and ruby rings. Except for being propped up on pillows, she looked as if she had been decorated for a grand entrance at a first night at the opera.

Mr. Clarron pursed his lips. "I don't want to alarm you, my love, but that's quite a possibility. I still wish you'd let me put them in a safe deposit for you. To keep fifty thousand pounds' worth of jewels in the house, these days, is simply asking for trouble."

"Please don't start that all over again, dear," she pleaded wanly. "They're insured, aren't they? And since I can never go out and show them off again, wearing them for you is the only pleasure I've got left. I know you can't understand how a woman feels, but it does make me happy. And they *are* mine, after all."

Mr. Clarron stoically refrained

from arguing. He had already devoted some of his best performances to that theme, without making any impression on her whimsical obduracy.

It had been somewhat of a shock to him when shortly after their marriage, he had discovered that the millionaire's baubles which she displayed so opulently were not complemented by proportionate resources in the bank. Her late husband, who had catered to her obsession by showering precious stones on her like a sultan, had apparently mortgaged his business assets so improvidently to do it that after his death they had barely realized enough to pay the inheritance taxes. Not that her value in gems alone was anything to be sneezed at, but it was less than Mr. Clarron had been counting on.

And her fanatical refusal to let the jewels out of her own custody for a moment had made it plain that nothing but a third widowhood would show him an appreciable profit.

However, a recent brainstorm had shown him how her jewelry could be made to return a double dividend, and he was quite glad that the original accident he had planned for her had failed and left him the chance to improve on it.

"Very well, my dear," he said. "But if he should call here and I happen to be out, you must refuse to talk to him on any pretext."

"I wouldn't dream of it. I'd be completely terrified. And I think you should warn the police about him at once."

"Of course, I should have done that already," he said.

Looking up from the garden at Adrienne Halberd's cottage, he was troubled with another consideration. He was forewarned that she had been in the bar at Skindle's when the Saint was asking about him, but he had no way of knowing what might have developed between them later. With unlimited confidence, he decided to take that bull also by the horns.

It was a blow under the belt when the girl admitted him at the back door and he instantly saw the lean bronzed man lounging on the couch under the window as if he owned it.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I had no idea you had company."

"Don't be silly, Reggie," she insisted breezily. "Come on in. We were just talking about you, anyway. This is Mr. Templar. I Picked him up at Skindle's. I heard him asking about you there, so we got talking."

Mr. Clarron's acting ability and stage presence still somehow stood by him.

"Mrs. Jafferty told me," he said, with absolute naturalness. "But frankly, I just can't place that Mrs. Brown you spoke of."

"I'm not surprised," said the Saint. "I didn't mean to spring it on you so bluntly, but Mrs. Brown was her sister. Mr. Brown is better known to the FBI as Bingo Brown, the racket boss of Baltimore."

"The Saint knows all the gangsters, of course," Adrienne contributed blithely. "He started telling me such fabulous stories about them, I just had to bring him home to hear more."

"Indeed?" Mr. Clarron's voice was impeccably distant. "But in this case I'm sure he's mistaken. My wife had no sister."

"I didn't expect you'd have heard of her," said the Saint. "When she took up with Bingo, her family disowned her and agreed never to mention her name. But she was still very fond of your late wife, and ever since that odd accident she's been pestering Bingo to find out if you were a right guy. So when I happened to run into him just before I was leaving, he asked me to look you up. Of course, it's absurd, but—"

"I think you have put it in a nutshell, Mr. Templar," Clarron said icily. "But if you want me to discuss this preposterous fabrication, I must do it another time." He turned to the girl. "I only dropped over, my dear, to ask if you would be home this evening. I have to run up to London on business, and won't be back until late; and it's Mrs. Jaffery's night off. I know everything is all right, but I'd just feel happier to know that my wife could call you in an emergency."

"Of course," Adrienne said awkwardly.

"Thank you, my dear."

Mr. Clarron bowed to the Saint with courtly frigidity, and walked out without faltering.

He was immune to panic—the career of a successful Bluebeard calls for coldblooded qualities that would scarcely be comprehensible to more temperamental murderers. But in much the same way as he had heard of the Saint, and perhaps less critically, he was well imbued with legends of the implacable code of America's gangdom.

He still had not lost his head. He could conceive that the fantastic thing that the Saint had suggested might be true, without actually having to concede that it was. But that only meant that he must delay no longer about setting in motion a plan that he had already worked out to the ultimate detail—had, in fact, already all the mechanical groundwork for.

If anything, the Saint's inexplicable and unforeseeable intrusion might even be woven in to its advantage, by such an uncommon genius as his.

He had realized this with an almost divine supra-consciousness while Adrienne Halberd was still introducing the Saint, and had spoken the essential

words without even thinking about them, impelled by nothing but his own infallible instinct.

Mr. Reginald Clarron walked back up the lawn to his own house without the slightest misgiving, concerned solely with the rather tiresome minutiae of killing his third wife that night.

V

Although the longest run of any play which Mr. Clarron had helped to produce had been four weeks, he could legitimately claim to be a West End producer, and as such he received a continual stream of plays for consideration. The cream of the crop, of course, went first to other producers with a more encouraging record of hits. But Mr. Clarron read all that came to him, always on the lookout for anything good enough for a promotion from which he at least would benefit, and always dreaming that some day something would fall into his hands of which he would be the first to see the potentialities, which would rocket him to wealth and prestige overnight.

From the manuscripts on his desk he selected the one which had lately impressed him the most, and telephoned the author, who lived in London.

"I really think we might do something with your play, my boy," he said. "I'd like to discuss just a few minor revisions with you. I don't get to town very often, but I have to run up this afternoon. Could you manage to have dinner with me? . . . Fine! Let's make it rather early—I don't want to be away from home too long."

Then he called his dentist, complained of a maddening toothache, and persuaded the man to squeeze him in for a few minutes at the end of the day.

Thus he consolidated his reason for leaving his wife alone on what had already been announced as Mrs. Jafferty's evening off. If the dentist could find nothing wrong with his teeth, the pain could always be attributed to neuraglia.

To his wife he said: "Since I have to make the trip, confound it, I really ought to see the fellow who wrote that play we read last week. I was just talking to him on the phone, and he told me that one of Rank's men is very excited about it. I'd hate to let it get away, with the picture rights half sold already."

"Of course, dear," she said. "I'll be perfectly all right, if you'll fix my table for me like you've done before."

"No one ever had such a wonderful wife and deserved it less," he said, with considerable truth.

The table was a piece of hospital furniture, built like a traveling bridge and high enough to span the bed. A system of ropes and pulleys which he had rigged up enabled her to pull

it up to her or push it away as she wished.

From the kitchen he brought up linen and silver, china and glass, bread and butter, sugar and cream, a bowl of strawberries, a decanter of wine, an electric coffee pot, and an electric chafing dish of Irish stew which she would only have to plug in and heat when she was ready.

Into the stew he had thoroughly stirred a certain tasteless drug which is much too easily obtainable to be freely mentioned in this connection, which in sufficient quantity induces profound sleep in about half an hour and death shortly afterwards. Taking no chances on a capricious appetite, Mr. Clarron had used enough to put away four people.

"It smells heavenly," he said, lifting the lid and sniffing. "But I kept some back for my lunch tomorrow, so you needn't try to save any for me."

He made sure that the television set was in the right position for her to watch from the bed—it had a remote control that she could operate from the night stand—made sure that all was in order with the devices that would make it unnecessary for her to be taken to the bathroom, saw that her books and magazines were within easy reach, checked the table again, fluffed up her pillows, and said:

"Is there anything else you might possibly need, my love?"

"Nothing," she said. "Just hurry back and spoil me some more."

Mr. Clarron kissed her tenderly on the forehead. He felt pretty good himself.. He was giving her the most humane death he could think of, even more peaceful than the lightning extinction of her predecessor. He was glad that he was not callous enough to hurt women. Only his first wife could really have suffered at all in her passing; but he had been quite an amateur then.

He was in the best of spirits when the young playwright met him at his club.

"The Irish stew is very good tonight, sir," said the dining-room steward.

It seemed almost like an omen.

"My favorite dinner, and I thought I was going to miss it. Not that it could be half as good as Mrs. Jafferty's—our housekeeper," Mr. Clarron explained to his guest. "She makes the best you ever tasted. Of course, she would. Irish as Paddy's pig, but a marvelous old biddy. They don't make 'em like that any more these days."

"How long have you had this treasure?" asked the young man perfunctorily.

"Only three weeks—and believe me, my boy, I sleep with my fingers crossed. We've had a bad time with servants. My wife being an invalid makes it

especially difficult, it's bound to make extra work. But Mrs. Jafferty never complains. And to think that I came near not hiring her at all."

"Really?" said his guest politely.

"I got her through an agency, you see, but she didn't have any references. I mean, nothing that I could actually verify. She'd been in her last job for more than twenty years, but then the people had gone off to live in New Zealand and she didn't want to leave England. She had a glowing letter of recommendation, but of course those can be faked.

"And even the place where she'd been staying since then, she'd only had a room there for a few days, and she'd been out all the time looking for jobs, so they knew nothing about her. I have to be extra careful, you know, because my wife insists on keeping all her jewels in the house."

"A bit risky, isn't it?" said the other, stifling a yawn.

"It wasn't an easy decision to make. But we were getting quite desperate, and if she was as good as the letter said I was afraid of losing her to somebody else while I was waiting for a reply from her last employers in New Zealand. So I decided to take the gamble. And I must say, she seems to be honest to the last half-penny. I let her do all the shopping, and our bills are the smallest they've ever been . . .

"By George, though," Mr. Clarron said with a sudden frown, "a suspicious character did turn up in Maidenhead today, asking where I lived. Wouldn't it be frightful if they were . . . Oh, but that's too far-fetched. But I wish I hadn't thought of it just now."

"Talking of suspicious characters," said the playwright, straw-clutching feverishly, "what did you think of the old man who comes to the door at the beginning of my second act? I've wondered if it would be more effective to keep him off the stage a bit longer, to build up the suspense."

Mr. Clarron nodded attentively, and thereafter confined himself admirably to the subject of their meeting. He had sounded most convincing, he thought, in his rehearsal.

He enjoyed his Irish stew. At any moment, he estimated, his wife would be eating hers.

VI

"I don't like it," Adrienne Halberd said abruptly.

"Now that you've told me about those jewels of Mrs. Clarron's I like it a bit less myself," Simon admitted. "It just might occur to Lover Boy now to improvise a burglary in which she gets bumped off, and try to make it look like my work."

Her pixie face was almost sullen with concentration. "I expect you could take care of yourself. I'm

talking about that story you cooked up, about some gangster called Bingo Brown being married to his last wife's black sheep sister and you being a friend of theirs."

"It was the best I could do in the few seconds we had."

"But don't you see, it might panic him into doing something drastic in a hurry, in the hope of getting away with his loot before you do something to him."

"That was roughly what I had in mind."

"But that would be *helping* to get another wife murdered!"

"When you hinted to him that you'd at least half killed a husband," Simon said, "mightn't that just as well have encouraged him to widow himself, knowing you wouldn't hold it against him?"

"All I hoped was that it might make him *talk* about it. And then, with a tape recorder—"

"Oh, I know. Just like in a detective story. But maybe he's read stories too. It might just as well have only encouraged him to get the job over without talking."

She stared at him resentfully. "Well, if you're so smart, how else can you get evidence against his kind of murderer?"

"It isn't easy, darling. You can only stick close to him and hope that you're close enough when he tries it again."

"But you can't use a human being like—like a sort of live bait!"

"Mrs. Clarron isn't in much more danger, by and large, than she's been all along. Maybe Reggie is a bit more anxious to get it over; but on the other hand there are now two of us keeping an eye on her. We saw Reggie drive away. I've been sitting by this open window ever since, and I have ears like a watchdog. When Reggie or anyone else comes near that house, I'll know it."

"But you can't stay here all night."

"I can think of worse fates."

"You might think of some better dialogue."

"I'm here now," he said practically. "And I'll stay for dinner, if I'm invited."

She stood up and paced restlessly. "Oh, you can stay. I think you'd better. I've got some chops in the Frig."

"And some more beer?"

"You've just drunk the last I had."

He got up and stretched himself. "It sound like a thirsty vigil. While you're toiling over a hot stove, suppose I run out and buy some more. I'm about out of cigarettes, too, anyway."

She hesitated an instant. "No, I'll go," she said. "I'd rather you stayed here. If anything violent did start to happen next door, I think you'd be more use than I would. But only for brawn, I mean!"

He thought that over for as brief a moment, his quizzical eyes on her; and then he shrugged.

"Okay, Brains," he said good-humoredly. "Would you like to take my car?"

"I've got my own, thanks. I'll throw on a skirt and be back in a minute."

It was, of course, easily fifteen minutes before she drove into the tiny garage again, and already she had seen that the Saint's hired car was no longer outside the cottage.

Even so, she tried frantically to believe for a fraction longer that he might only have moved his car up the road to a less conspicuous place, to make a returning Clarron believe that he had left. She ran into the cottage calling his name, but the empty rooms had no answer.

There was a note stuck in the refrigerator door.

Decided I might only mess things up for you after all, so I pushed off. Thanks, apologies, and good luck.

The signature was a little stick figure with a rakishly tilted halo.

She ran out into the dusk, almost calling his name again. But the only response, she knew, would have been the faint sounds she heard of a radio or television program playing in the house next door. She looked back and up from further down her lawn, and saw the light shining blankly and steadily against the ceiling of an upstairs bedroom window. She rushed back into her cottage and flung herself at the telephone.

VII

Mr. Reginald Clarron got off the train at Maidenhead at 10:12 P.M., exchanged greetings and a few trivial words about his trip with the station master, climbed into the car he had parked at the station, and drove home at his normal sedate speed.

He noticed that the strange car which must have been the Saint's was no longer outside the cottage next door, and thought that his auspices might be even better than he had hoped.

As he unlocked his front door —he was glad he would be spared the necessity of faking a burglarous entrance, with all its possible pitfalls, for of course he had let it be known that Mrs. Jafferty had a key—he heard the inexorable voice of a BBC announcer holding forth from the receiver upstairs.

Exactly as he would have done on any similar normal evening, Mr. Clarron took pains to hang up his hat in the hall, stick his superfluous umbrella in the stand under it, pull of his gloves and lay them in the calling-card tray. He would not be so foolish as to omit one iota of his habitual routine. He even went into the kitchen, drew himself a glass of water, and drank it, as he always did before he went to bed.

Then he tiptoed up the stairs and softly opened the door of his wife's bedroom.

The television set was still on,

and so was the bedside light, but his wife seemed to be asleep. She lay on her stomach with her face buried in the pillows.

"My love," Mr. Clarron said loudly.

She did not stir.

The table was pushed down towards the foot of the bed. A glance verified that she had eaten and drunk the wine, although the bowl of strawberries had scarcely been touched and the coffee cup was two-thirds full. Using his handkerchief, he lifted the lid of the chafing dish and saw that it had almost been emptied. He put the lid back and returned to the head of the bed.

"My dearest," he said, and pulled on her shoulder as if to turn her over.

Her weight resisted him with a curious heaviness; and when he let go she fell back limply, without a sound.

Mr. Clarron suddenly became a whirlwind of activity, for at this point any lapse of more than a few seconds might have to be accounted for.

He hustled out of the room, across the landing, and into his own bedroom. In the top drawer of his dressing table lay a clean pair of white cotton gloves. As he picked them up and rapidly pulled them on, there was disclosed underneath them a light claw-ended crowbar of the type used for opening small crates—which Mrs. Jafferty had purchased a week ago at the local ironmonger's in the course of her household errands.

Mr. Clarron hurried back with it to his wife's bedside.

Her jewels were kept in the top drawer of the bedside table, where she could easily reach them. As a concession to his concern for their safety she had had a combination lock put on and made a coy secret copy of the combination, even though he had tried to point out that the drawer was still no stronger than the wood it was made of.

He proved this in a matter of seconds with a couple of quick leverings with his crowbar, splintering the front of the drawer out with a pleasantly surprising minimum of noise.

He pulled out her jewel case, opened it on top of the night stand, and rapidly transferred its contents to his pockets. He let the crowbar lie on the floor where it had fallen. He leaned over his wife, unfastened the clasp at the back of her neck, and pulled the necklace and its sapphire pendant from under her. He picked up her hand to twist the rings off her fingers . . .

He did not know precisely what stopped him, whether it was a movement glimpsed out of the corner of his eye or the faint squeak and stir of air that went with it. But he turned his head, and with that became frozen.

The door of a massive old wardrobe across the room was

very stealthily swinging open.

The door itself cut off the light of the bedside lamp from what was inside. But the shadowed opening was still not too dark for him to see, and recognize, the bulgingly bovine shape of Mrs. Jafferty, the unmistakable mound of her atrociously carrot-tinted hair.

Mr. Clarron's intestines seemed to turn into coils of quivering lead, and his lungs sagged through his diaphragm and took all his breath with them. A draught from the North Pole squirmed over his skin and brought out beads of clammy sweat where it touched.

"Faith an' begorra," said the broadest brogue outside Killarney, "if it isn't himself robbin' the trinkets from his poor darlin' wife, and her not yet cold from his poison an' all!"

There was a breaking point even to Mr. Clarron's adamantine self-control. He turned and ran out of the room, screaming.

He had no idea where he was going or what he was going to do. He stumbled down the stairs in a pure frenzy of planless flight, flight for its own primitive sake, spurred by the unreasoning need to get away anywhere from the impossible incomprehensible thing that he had seen.

Out of the house, anywhere, where he could have one moment's reprieve to encompass the exploding debris of disaster, to try and grab the pieces together and re-shape them into some form that would magically ward off utter catastrophe . . .

He threw open the front door and plunged solidly into the comfortably cushioned facade of Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal.

Mr. Teal said *"Oof!"*—caught him as he bounced off, and set him upright in the hall.

"What's the matter, Mr. Clarron?" Teal asked drowsily.

As his torpid bulk evacuated the doorway, it revealed two uniformed men on the step outside.

"My wife," Clarron babbled. "Dead in her bed! Drawer broken open—her jewels gone! And Mrs. Jafferty—"

He broke off there. The first words had come out, incoherently enough, but unhesitatingly, with a kind of reflex assurance made glib by the number of times he had mentally rehearsed just such a speech. But after he had blurted out Mrs. Jafferty's name he did not know how to go on. He had never visualized having to say anything about her in her presence.

Mr. Teal, however, did not seem to notice the aposiopesis. He was staring over Mr. Clarron's shoulder, and upwards, with his baby-blue eyes dilating in a most peculiar manner.

"Bejabers," trumpeted a voice of distilled shamrock, "and if it isn't me ould friend the fat boy of Scotland Yard, himself, arrivin' late for the wake as usual."

Mr. Clarron turned, drawn by an awful but irresistible magnetism.

Billowing down the stairs came an exuberant female figure crowned with a bird's-nest of hideous ginger hair.

"She must have done it," Clarron chattered hysterically. "I should never have taken her without references. She was hiding up there—"

"Sure, and is that any way for a gentleman to be talkin', tryin' to put the blame on an honest workin' woman? And himself all the time schemin' to murdher his own wife, the poor soul, an' run off with his fancy lady next door, who I see sneakin' in here already to be with him before the body is cold!"

Teal glanced back for a moment, at Adrienne Halberd who was sidling in behind the two constables; and turned back to the staircase with a tinge of purple creeping into his rubicund complexion.

"Take off that ridiculous get-up, Saint," he roared, "and let's hear what you think you're up to!"

"Well, if you insist," said the Saint meekly. "But I was just starting to get the feel of the part."

He unbuttoned the old-fashioned black dress, peeled it off, and draped it over the stair rail. Underneath it he wore a kind of upholstered combination garment extending down to his knees and padded in all the necessary places to produce Mrs. Jafferty's voluptuous contours.

He took that off and hung it similarly over the rail, where it slid down to join the dress. Completing his descent of the stairs, he removed the orange-colored wig and set it carefully on the banister knob at the bottom.

"It's Simon Templar!" croaked Mr. Clarron. And for one delirious instant he felt inspired, invulnerable. "He did it in that disguise! He was with Mrs. Halberd this afternoon when I said I was going to London. She's probably his accomplice—"

"*Miss* Halberd," Teal said precisely, "is a police officer, acting under my orders."

"As it eventually dawned on me," said the Saint. "And there never was a Mrs. Jafferty, except when Reginald dressed up in that outfit. Instead of trying to dream up the perfect alibi, which has tripped up a lot of bright lads, he dreamed up the perfect scapegoat. And before he has any more attacks of genius, and before I budge from here, I wish someone would go through his pockets, where they'll find Mrs. Clarron's jewels. And if he has anything to say after that, ask him why he's wearing those white cotton gloves."

"What do you mean, it eventually dawned on you that I was

with the police?" Adrienne Halberd demanded sulkily.

Simon lighted a cigarette. "The way you picked me up at Skindle's was rather determined," he said. "But I could swallow that temporarily. When you told me you were investigating for an insurance company, I could take that for a while too. There are such things as female private eyes, even if they aren't very often eyefuls. And when you said you'd been a distant adorer of mine since you were in pigtails, it was piling it up a bit tall, but I could still open my mouth that wide. Weird as it may seem, I have met such crazy gals.

"But with all that build-up, you'd set yourself a lot to live up to. And soon after you found out that I hadn't any information to add to what you'd told me, or any definite plan to let you in on, you changed quite startlingly. Gone was the worshiping bug-eyed fan. You became impatient, critical — even caustic. You couldn't see any merit at all in the idea that I ad libbed on two seconds' notice when Reggie started to amble over. And it wasn't such a bad one, either. But it made you almost rude."

"If I remember," she said, "you weren't such a paragon—"

"But I wasn't trying to sell anything, darling. You had been. And the transformation was just too sudden. A real fan would have thought anything I suggested was marvelous, no matter how screwy or dangerous it sounded. And then I realized something else. This was Claud Eustace's last big case, and he'd warned me to keep out of it, but I told him I intended to stick my nose in anyway.

"Yet I came straight to Maidenhead, and none of the local constabulary was around to meet me and back up Teal's orders. More surprising still, there wasn't even a vestige of a cop anywhere around here, keeping tabs on Reggie or trying to save Mrs. Clarron from being bumped off. So at last I connected. The cop had to be you.

"Teal had plenty of time to phone you while I was driving down from Hanworth, tell you I was headed for Skindle's, tell you to pick me up there, rope me, and keep me handy. The explanation you had to hatch up between you wasn't so hard to invent; but I could almost hear the wheels whirring in Teal's fat head, and see his buttons popping with pride at his own brilliance."

VIII

Chief Inspector Teal thumbed open a tiny envelope of spearmint and mailed the contents in his mouth. "All right," he said trenchantly. "But what happened after Miss Halberd left you in her cottage?"

"After she left me to phone you for more advice," said the Saint smoothly, "I went over those ran-

dom hunches again and convinced myself. Then I knew I wouldn't have much more time to work on my own, and I really was seriously worried about what my appearance and my story might rush Reggie into doing.

"I decided that I just had to see if I couldn't find a clue in his house—which you couldn't have tried without a search warrant. You know my methods, Claud. Impulsive. So I picked up the phone and called Mrs. Clarron, and said I was the local police."

"Falsely representing yourself to be a police officer," barked Teal.

"For which I might easily get fined a few pounds," said the Saint sadly. "I said that Mr. Clarron had asked us to keep an eye on her on account of a suspicious character in the neighborhood; and it was really a break when she wasn't a bit surprised. Reggie had warned her about the Saint. So I asked if we might send a man over to make sure that everything was all right. She said yes, but she couldn't let him in. I said that was all right, Mr. Clarron had left us a key. I moved my car up the road, walked back, and jiggered the lock, which is a very easy one."

"He broke in," jabbered Mr. Clarron forlornly. "He admits it!"

It was not a very effective effort, considering the heap of jewels from his pockets which one of the constables was laboriously inventorying while the other counted them on to an outspread handkerchief. Teal glanced at him almost pityingly.

"I told her I wanted to check all the windows," Simon went on, "which gave me an excuse to roam through the house. I didn't have to roam far. In Reggie's bedroom, the first thing that caught my eye was a typical old theatrical trunk. I opened the lid; and right on top was this wig, and underneath it those dowager-size falsies."

He caused for a dramatic moment which he could not deny himself, releasing a leisured streamer of smoke.

"It was all clear in a bolt of lightning. There was no mistaking that hair—I'd seen Mrs. Jafferty at the pub, as Adrienne can tell you. And she'd told me that he was an actor, and once played with a sort of minstrel troupe. I could see Reggie's face as I'd met him this afternoon, and of course it was Mrs. Jafferty's, with the powder and rouge and lipstick off and those horn-rimmed glasses added. I remembered that in those old music-hall skits with a comic charwoman, which Mrs. Jafferty had reminded me of nothing else, but, the part was nearly always played by a man."

"Go on."

"What a wonderful gag, Claud! He passes himself off as his own housekeeper, and creates an identity that a dozen tradesmen

and villagers will vouch for—only telling his wife that he can't find anyone and he's doing all the housework himself. Being confined to her bed, she never saw him go out, or come in in that costume; and they never had visitors.

"So when she's found dead, and her jewels are stolen, and Mrs. Jafferty has disappeared, it's so obvious that he doesn't need much of an alibi. The beetle brains of the C I D are so busy combing the country for Mrs. Jafferty that they'd never think of anything else."

"But what did you *do?*" Teal almost howled.

"I didn't stop there. In the top drawer of his dresser I found those gloves he had on, and a small crowbar which is now on the floor of his wife's bedroom where he used it to jimmy her jewel drawer. No doubt someone would swear Mrs. Jafferty bought it. I went to the maid's room. There were a few clothes and personal articles which a woman like that would have—he was that thorough. I also found this, which you can bet Mrs. Jafferty bought from the local chemist."

He produced a small dark bottle from his pocket and handed it over.

"Believe me, Claud, that was a jolt. I'd hoped to goose him into something rash, but it was meant to be something that I could move in fast and prevent—like perhaps a clonk on the head with that crowbar. And now I was certain that this was the night, with him going to London, and Mrs. Jafferty supposedly out. But poison . . ."

Adrienne Halberd was reading the label on the bottle over Teal's shoulder, and her face had gone white.

"She had a lovely plate of Irish stew," said the Saint remorselessly. "I said, just to clinch it: 'I bet your cook is an Irish woman.' 'Oh, no,' she said, 'we haven't been able to get a cook for weeks. My husband has to do everything, but does it well.' "

A sort of inarticulate sob came from the talented husband; and Mr. Teal somewhat belatedly remembered an official obligation.

"Mr. Clarron," he said formally, "it's my duty to warn you that anything you say will be taken down and may be used in evidence. Now, did you wish to make any statement?"

"I did it," Clarron said hopelessly. "Everything. Just as he said."

Teal nodded to the constable with the notebook. "And the one before?"

"Yes. I knocked the radio into her bath."

"What about the first one—the one who was drowned?"

"I killed her too," Clarron said with his head in his hands. "I upset the boat and held her under."

Suddenly the girl thrust herself between them. "You idiots, all of you!" she cried insubordinately. "We might still save this one. We should be getting a doctor."

"Don't waste his time," said the Saint. "I tried to break it all to Mrs. Clarron, but it was tough going. As you can imagine. She got quite hysterical at one stage; but luckily there was quite a hysterical play on television at the same time, so nobody outside would have noticed much. But at least she lost all her appetite. I took advantage of that to arrange the table as if she'd been eating, and put most of the stew, the wine, and the coffee in other containers, which you can take for analysis if you need it.

"I got her half convinced, but I knew she was in no condition to play dead when Reggie came in, even if I could have talked her into trying; and she had to do that if he was to book himself all the way to the gallows. So when I heard the key in the lock, I just gave her a little judo tap on the neck."

Simon smiled apologetically. "She should wake up any minute now, and all she'll need is an aspirin and a good dinner."

As if on cue, a dull moan reached them from the floor above; and Adrienne ran up the stairs.

It was somewhat later when Teal, Simon, and the girl wound up back at the cottage next door.

The uniformed men had taken Mr. Clarron away, and a nurse had arrived to take charge of his wife. Mrs. Clarron had refused to let a doctor be called in with sedatives, but she was quietly and methodically getting drunk, which would eventually have a similar effect.

The Saint couldn't blame her. "That's the one ugly thing left," he said. "She's still got to live with the results of Reginald's first attempt. I'll always wonder if it wouldn't have been kinder to let her eat that stew."

"Perhaps you won't have to," Adrienne said. "She told me that the specialists had been talking about another operation that might fix her up."

The Saint's eyes lightened. "Then maybe it's not so indecent to celebrate after all. And some celebration certainly seems called for. I suppose you did bring some beer when you thought I'd be waiting when you came back, and Claud and I should drink a parting toast."

"You're forgetting," Teal said stodgily. "I don't drink. Fat men didn't ought to drink."

Adrienne made him a cup of tea.

"The one thing that puzzles me," Simon said, "is why you took so long to show up at Clarron's, Claud, after I disappeared from here. Or, put it another way, how you were on his doorstep at the ideal moment."

"After you left Hanworth," Teal said reluctantly, "I came down to the Maidenhead police station and waited for Miss Halberd to get in touch with me. When she reported that Clarron had gone to London, I had a man watch the railway station to let us know when he came back. She phoned and told me you'd left, and I hoped you meant it.

"I came over and joined her here. We were informed as soon as Clarron got off the train, and we started watching his house. I was afraid he might try something desperate soon, after the scare you'd given him, and I could only hope we'd be able to prevent it. As soon as he started screaming, we rushed over."

"But you hadn't spotted that Mrs. Jafferty was purely fictitious."

"Not yet."

"And if I hadn't been there, you still wouldn't have been in time to save Mrs. Clarron's life."

"We might have been able to get her to a hospital in time."

"You wouldn't. But even if you had, you'd only have been looking for Mrs. Jafferty. And even if you'd discovered that she was a phony, you could only have convicted Reginald of attempted murder. It took the fright I threw into him to make him confess everything."

"That's probably true," Teal said grudgingly. "But it still doesn't excuse your interfering and taking the law into your own hands." His voice rose a little. "And one of these days—"

"Now you're forgetting," Simon reminded him gently. "There aren't going to be any more of these days for you. You're retiring, and you'll only read about me in the papers."

Chief Inspector Teal swallowed.

He looked ahead into a vague Elysian vista in which there were no problems, no apprehensions—and no taunting privateer with unquenchable devilment in his eyes and an impudent forefinger pointing like a rapier at his stomach. It would be very restful; and there would be something lacking.

"That's right," said Mr. Teal. He hauled himself sluggishly to his feet, and put out his hand; and for almost the first time in all those years Simon saw something very like a smile on his round pink apopletic face.

"I'm rather glad it ends up this way," Teal said. He glanced self-consciously around him. "But I've still got work to do tonight. And I think Miss Halberd has some apologizing to do which she might rather do in private. The rent's paid on this cottage to the end of the month," he added inconsequently. "So if you'll excuse me—"

"Damn it, Claud Eustace," said the Saint. "I'm going to miss you too."

murder gathers momentum

by . . . Cornell Woolrich

Paine had made a promise—and not even his own death could prevent him from keeping it.

PAINE HUNG AROUND outside the house waiting for old Ben Burroughs' caller to go, because he wanted to see him alone. You can't very well ask anyone for a loan of two hundred and fifty dollars in the presence of someone else, especially when you have a pretty strong hunch you're going to be turned down flat and told where to get off.

But Paine had a stronger reason for not wanting witnesses to his interview with the old skinflint. The large handkerchief in his back pocket, folded triangularly, had a special purpose, and that little instrument in another pocket—wasn't it to be used in prying open a window?

While he lurked in the shrubbery, watching the lighted window and Burroughs' form seated inside it, he kept rehearsing the plea he'd composed, as though he were still going to use it.

"Mr. Burroughs, I know it's late, and I know you'd rather not be reminded that I exist. But desperation can't wait, and I'm desperate." *That sounded good.* "Mr. Burroughs, I worked for

When Cornell Woolrich was nineteen a first-novel award brought him to the glittering gates of Hollywood, and a recognition enviable indeed in one so young. Then for some reason young Woolrich turned his back on Hollywood and started all over again from scratch—by writing detective stories for the pulp magazines. A comedown? Hardly—for by dint of his genius for creating and maintaining suspense he has won through to fame.

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your concern faithfully for ten long years, and the last six months of its existence, to help keep it going, I voluntarily worked at half wages, on your given word that my defaulted pay would be made up as soon as things got better. Instead of that, you went into phony bankruptcy to cancel your obligations."

Then a little soft soap to take the sting out of it. "I haven't come near you all these years, and I haven't come to make trouble now. If I thought you really didn't have the money, I still wouldn't. But it's common knowledge by now that the bankruptcy was a subterfuge. It's obvious by the way you continue to live that you salvaged your own investment.

"I've lately heard rumors of your backing a dummy corporation under another name to take up where you left off. Mr. Burroughs, the exact amount of the six-months promissory half wages due me is two hundred and fifty dollars."

Just the right amount of dignity and self-respect—Pauline had commented at this point—*not wishy-washy or maudlin.*

And then for a bang-up finish, and every word of it true. "Mr. Burroughs, I have to have help right tonight. It can't wait another twenty-four hours. There are holes the size of fifty-cent pieces in the soles of my shoes. I have a wedge of cardboard in the bottom of each one. We haven't had light or gas in a week now. There's a bailiff coming tomorrow morning to put out the little that's left of our furniture, and seal the door.

"If I was alone in this, I'd still fight it through, without going to anyone. But Mr. Burroughs, I have a wife at home to support. You may not remember her, a pretty little dark-haired girl who once worked as a stenographer in your office for a month or two. You surely wouldn't know her now. She's aged twenty years in the past two."

That was about all. That was about all anyone could have said. And yet Paine knew he would be licked before he could utter a word of it.

He couldn't see the old man's visitor. The caller was out of range of the window. Burroughs was seated in a line with it, profile toward Paine. Paine could see his mean, thin-lipped mouth moving. Once or twice he raised his hand in a desultory gesture. Then he seemed to be listening, and finally he nodded slowly.

He held his forefinger up and shook it, as if impressing some point on his auditor. After that he rose and moved deeper into the room, but without getting out of line with the window.

He stood against the far wall, hand out to a tapestry hanging there. Paine craned his neck, strained his eyes. There must be

a wall safe behind the tapestry the old codger was about to open. If he only had a pair of binoculars handy.

Paine saw the old miser pause, turn his head, and make some request of the other person. A hand abruptly grasped the looped shade-cord and drew the shade to the bottom.

Paine gritted his teeth. The old fossil wasn't taking any chances, was he? You'd think he was a mind reader, knew there was some one outside watching him in the darkness. But a chink remained, showing a line of light at the bottom. Paine sidled out of his hiding place and glided up to the window. He put his eyes to it and focused on Burroughs' dialing hand, to the exclusion of everything else.

A three-quarters turn to the left, about to where the numeral 8 would be on the face of a clock. Then back to about where 3 would be. Then back the other way, this time to 10. Simple enough. He must remember that —8-3-10.

Burroughs was opening it now, and bringing out a cash box. He set it down on the table and opened it. Paine's eyes hardened and his mouth twisted sullenly. *Look at all that money!* The old fossil's gnarled hand dipped into the box, brought out a sheaf of bills, counted them. He put back a few, counted the remainder a second time and set them on the table-top while he returned the cash box, closed the safe and straightened out the tapestry.

A blurred figure moved partly into the way at this point—too close to the shade gap to come clearly into focus—but without obliterating the little stack of bills on the table. Burroughs' claw-like hand picked the bills up, held them out. A second hand, smoother, reached for them. The two hands shook.

Paine prudently retreated to his former lookout point. He knew where the safe was now, that was all that mattered. He wasn't a moment too soon. The shade shot up an instant later, this time with Burroughs' hand guiding the cord. The other person had withdrawn again. Burroughs moved after him out of range, and the room abruptly darkened. A moment later a light flickered on in the porch ceiling.

Paine quickly shifted to the side of the house, in the moment's grace given him, in order to make sure his presence wasn't detected.

The door opened. Burroughs' voice croaked a curt "Night" to which the departing visitor made no answer. The interview had evidently not been an altogether cordial one. The door closed again, with quite a little force. A quick step crossed the porch, went along the cement walk to the street, away from where Paine stood pressed flat against the side of the house. He didn't bother

trying to see who it was. It was too dark for that, and his primary purpose was to keep his own presence concealed.

When the annonymous tread had safely died away in the distance, Paine moved to where he could command a clear view of the front of the house. Burroughs was alone in it now, he knew. He was too niggardly even to employ a full-time servant. A dim light showed for a moment or two through the fanlight over the door, coming from the back of the hall. Now was the time to ring the doorbell, if he expected to make his plea to the old duffer before he retired.

He knew that, and yet something seemed to be keeping him from ascending the porch and ringing the doorbell. He knew what it was, too, but he woudn't admit it to himself.

"He'll only say no pointblank, and slam the door in my face," was the excuse he gave himself as he crouched back in the shrubbery, waiting. "And then once he's seen me out here, I'll be the first one he'll suspect afterwards when—"

The fanlight had gone dark now and Burroughs was on his way upstairs. A bedroom window on the floor above lighted up. There was still time; if he rang even now, Burroughs would come downstairs again and answer the door. But Paine didn't make the move, stayed there patiently waiting.

The bedroom window blacked out at last, and the house became dark and lifeless. Paine stayed there, still fighting with himself. Not a battle, really, because that had been lost long ago. But he went on giving himself excuses for what he knew he was about to do. Excuses for not going off about his business and remaining what he had been until now—an honest man.

How could he face his wife, if he came back empty-handed? Tomorrow their furniture would be piled on the sidewalk. Night after night he had promised to tackle Burroughs, and each time he'd put it off, walked past the house without summoning up nerve enough to go through with it. Why?

For one thing he didn't have the courage to stomach the sharp-tongued, sneering refusal that he was sure he'd get. But the more important thing had been the realization that once he made his plea, he automatically cancelled this other, unlawful way of getting the money. Burroughs had probably forgotten his existence after all these years. But if he reminded him of it by interviewing him ahead of time—

Paine tightened his belt decisively. Well, he wasn't coming home to her empty-handed tonight, but he still wasn't going to tackle Burroughs for it either.

Pauline would never need to find out just how he'd got it.

He straightened and looked all around him. No one in sight. The house was isolated. Most of the streets around it were only laid out and paved by courtesy for they bordered vacant lots. He moved in cautiously but determinedly toward the window of that room where he had seen the safe.

Cowardice can result in the taking of more risks than the most reckless courage. He was afraid of little things—afraid of going home and facing his wife empty-handed, afraid of asking an ill-tempered old reprobate for money because he knew he would be reviled and driven away—and so he was about to become a law-breaker for the first time in his life.

The window opened so easily. It was almost an *invitation* to unlawful entry, the way it opened. He stood up on the sill, and the cover of a paper book of matches, thrust into the intersection between the two window halves, pushed the tongue of the latch out of the way.

He dropped to the ground, applied the little instrument he had brought to the lower frame, and it slid effortlessly up. A minute later he was in the room, had closed the window so it wouldn't look suspicious from the outside. He wondered why he'd always thought until now it took skill and patience to break into a house. There was nothing to it.

He took out the folded handkerchief and tied it around the lower part of his face. For a minute he wasn't going to bother with it, and later he was sorry he had, in one way. And then again, it probably would have happened anyway, even without it. It wouldn't keep him from being seen, only from being identified.

He knew enough not to turn on the room lights, but he had nothing so scientific as a pocket torch with him to take their place. He had to rely on ordinary matches, which meant he could only use one hand for the safe dial, after he had cleared the tapestry out of the way.

It was a toy thing, a gimcrack. He hadn't even the exact combination, just the approximate position—8-3-10. It wouldn't work, the first time, so he varied it slightly, and then it clicked free.

He opened it, brought out the cash box, set it on the table. It was as though the act of setting it down threw a master electric switch. The room was suddenly drenched with light and Burroughs stood in the open doorway, bathrobe around his weazened frame, left hand out to the wall switch, the other clasping a gun trained on Paine.

Paine's knees knocked together. His windpipe constricted, and he died a little—the way only an amateur caught red-

handed at his first attempt can, a professional never. His thumb stung unexpectedly, and he mechanically whipped out the live match he was holding. He watched Burroughs fearfully.

"Just got down in time, didn't I?" the old man said with spiteful satisfaction. "It mayn't be much of a safe, but it sets off a buzzer up by my bed every time it swings open."

He should have moved straight across to the phone, right there in the room with Paine, and called for help. But he had a vindictive streak in him, he couldn't resist rubbing it in.

"You know what you're going to get for this, don't you?" he went on, licking his indrawn lips. "And I'll see that you get it too, every last month of it that's coming to you." He took a quick step forward. "Now get away from that safe. Get all the way back over there and don't you make a move until I—"

A sudden dawning suspicion entered his glittering little eyes. "Wait a minute. Haven't I seen you somewhere before? There's something familiar about you." He moved closer. "Take off that mask," he ordered. "Let me see who the devil you are!"

II

Paine became panic-stricken at the thought of revealing his face. He didn't stop to think that as long as Burroughs had him at gunpoint anyway, and he couldn't get away, the old man was bound to find out who he was sooner or later. He shook his head in unreasoning terror.

"No!" he panted hoarsely, billowing out the handkerchief over his mouth. He even tried to back away, but there was a chair or something in the way, and he couldn't.

That brought the old man in closer. "Then by golly I'll take it off for you!" he snapped.

He reached out for the lower triangular point of it. His right hand slanted out of line with Paine's body as he did so, was no longer exactly covering him with the gun. But the variation was nothing to take a chance on.

Cowardice. Cowardice that spurs you to a rashness the stoutest courage would quail from. Paine didn't stop to think of the gun. He suddenly hooked onto both the old man's arms, spread-eagling them. It was such a harebrained chance to take that Burroughs wasn't expecting it. No one armed with a gun would have been, and accordingly it worked. The gun clicked futilely, pointed up toward the ceiling. It must have jammed, or else the first chamber was empty and Burroughs hadn't known it.

Paine kept warding that arm off at a wide angle. But his chief concern was the empty hand clawing toward the handkerchief. Then he swiveled far downward

the other way, out of reach. He twisted the scrawny skin around the old man's skinny right wrist, until pain made the hand flop over open and drop the gun. It fell between them to the floor, and Paine scuffed it a foot or two out of reach with the side of his foot.

The he locked that same foot behind one of Burroughs', and pushed him over it. The old man went sprawling backwards on the floor, and the short unequal struggle was over. Yet even as he went, he was victorious. His down-flung left arm, as Paine released it to send him over, swept up in an arc, clawed, and took the handkerchief with it.

He sprawled there now, cradled on the point of one elbow, breathing malign recognition that was like a knife through Paine's heart.

"You're Dick Paine, you dirty crook! I know you now! You're Dick Paine, my old employee! You're going to pay for this."

That was all he had time to say. It was his own death warrant. Paine was acting under such neuromuscular compulsion, brought on by the instinct of self-preservation, that he wasn't even conscious of stooping to retrieve the fallen gun. The next thing he knew it was in his hand, pointed toward the accusing mouth that was all he was afraid of.

He jerked the trigger. For the second time it clicked—either jammed or unloaded at that chamber. He was to have that on his conscience afterwards, that click—like a last chance given him to keep from doing what he was about to do. That made it something different, that took away the shadowy little excuse he would have had until now, that changed it from an impulsive act committed in the heat of anger to a deed of cold-blooded, deliberate murder, with plenty of time to think twice before it was committed. And conscience makes cowards of us all. And he was a coward already, to begin with.

Burroughs even had time to sputter the opening syllable of a desperate plea for mercy, a promise of immunity. True, he probably wouldn't have kept it.

"Don't! Paine—Dick, don't! I won't say anything, I won't tell 'em you were here."

But Burroughs knew who he was. Paine tugged at the trigger, and the third chamber held death in it. This time the gun crashed, and Burroughs' whole face was veiled in a puff of smoke. By the time it had thinned he was already dead, head on the floor, a tenuous thread of red streaking from the corner of his mouth, as though he had no more than split his lip.

Paine was the amateur even to the bitter end. In the death hush that followed his first half-audible remark was: "Mr. Burroughs, I didn't mean to—"

Then he just stared in white-faced consternation. "Now, I've done it! I've killed a man—and they kill you for that. Now I'm in for it!"

He looked at the gun, appalled, as though it alone, and not he was to blame for what had happened. He picked up the handkerchief, and dazedly rubbed at the weapon, then desisted again. It seemed to him safer to take it with him, even though it was Burroughs' gun. He had an amateur's mystic dread of fingerprints.

He was sure he wouldn't be able to clean it thoroughly enough to remove all traces of his own handling. Even in the very act of trying to clean it, he might leave others. He sheathed it in the inner pocket of his coat.

He looked this way, and that. He'd better get out of here. He'd better get out fast. Already the drums of flight were beginning to beat in him, and he knew they'd never be silent again.

The cash box was still standing there on the table where he'd left it. He went to it and flung the lid up. He didn't want this money now any more, it had curdled for him, it had become blood money. But he had to have some at least; to make it easier to keep from getting caught.

He didn't stop to count how much there was in the box but there must have been at least a thousand by the looks of it. Maybe even fifteen or eighteen hundred.

He wouldn't take a cent more than was coming to him. He'd only take the two hundred and fifty he'd come here to get. To his frightened mind that seemed to make his crime less heinous, if he contented himself with taking just what was rightfully his.

That seemed to keep it from being outright murder and robbery, enabled him to maintain the fiction that it had been just a collection of a debt accompanied by a frightful and unforeseen accident. And one's conscience, after all, is the most dreaded policeman of the lot.

And furthermore, he realized as he hastily counted the money out, thrust the sum into his back trouser pocket, and buttoned the pocket down over it, he couldn't tell Pauline that he'd been here—or she'd know what he'd done. He'd have to make her think that he'd got the money somewhere else. That shouldn't be hard. He'd put off coming here to see Burroughs night after night, he'd shown her plainly that he hadn't relished the idea of approaching his former boss. She'd been the one who had kept egging him on.

Only tonight Pauline had said, "I don't think you'll every carry it out, I've about given up hope."

So what more natural than to let her think that in the end he hadn't? He'd think up some other explanation to account for the

presence of the money. He'd have to. If not right tonight, then tomorrow. It would come to him after the shock of this had worn off a little and he could think more calmly.

Had he left anything around that would betray him, that they could trace to him? He'd better put the cash box back. There was just a chance that they wouldn't know exactly how much the old skinflint had had on hand. They often didn't, with his type. He wiped it off carefully with the handkerchief he'd had around his face, twisted the dial closed on it, dabbed at that. He didn't go near the window again. He put out the light and made his way out by the front door of the house

He opened it with the handkerchief and closed it after him again, and after an exhaustive survey of the desolate street, descended the porch and moved quickly along the front walk. He turned left along the gray tape of sidewalk that threaded the gloom, toward the distant trolley line that he wasn't going to board at this particular stop, at this particular hour.

He looked up once or twice at the star-flecked sky as he trudged along. It was over. That was all there was to it. Just a jealously guarded secret now. A memory, that he daren't share with anyone else, not even Pauline. But deep within him, he knew better. It wasn't over, it was just beginning. That had been just the curtain raiser back there. Murder, like a snowball rolling down a slope, gathers momentum as it goes.

He had to have a drink. He had to try to drown the horrible thing out of him. He couldn't go home dry with it on his mind. They stayed open until four, didn't they, places like that? He wasn't much of a drinker, he wasn't familiar with details like that. Yes, there was one over there, on the other side of the street. And this was far enough away, more than two-thirds of the way from Burroughs' to his own place.

It was empty. That might be better; then again it might not. He could be too easily remembered. Well, too late now, he was already at the bar. "A straight whiskey." The barman didn't even have time to turn away before he spoke again. "Another one."

He shouldn't have done that. It looked suspicious, to gulp it that quick.

"Turn that radio off," he said hurriedly. He shouldn't have said that, that sounded suspicious too. The barman had looked at him when he did. And the silence was worse, if anything. Unbearable. Those throbbing drums of danger. "Never mind, turn it on again."

"Make up your mind, mister," the barman said, in mild reproof.

He seemed to be doing all the

wrong things. He shouldn't have come in here at all, to begin with. Well, he'd get out before he put his foot in it any worse,

"How much?" He took out the solitary fifty-cent piece that was all he had in his pocket.

"Seventy-five cents."

His stomach dropped an inch. Not *that* money! He didn't want to have to bring that out, it would show too plainly on his face.

"Most places they charge a quarter for straight whiskey—a quarter a drink."

"Not this brand. You didn't specify." But the barman was on guard now, scenting a dead-beat. He was leaning over the counter, right square in front of him, in a position to take in every move he made with his hands.

He shouldn't have ordered that second drink. All for a quarter he was going to have to take that whole wad out right under this man's eyes. And maybe he wouldn't remember that tomorrow, after the jumpy way Paine had acted in here!

"Where's the washroom?"

"That door right back there behind the cigarette machine." But the barman was now plainly suspicious. Paine could tell that by the way he kept looking at him.

Paine closed the washroom door after him, sealed it with his shoulder blades, unbuttoned his back pocket and rifled through the money, looking for the smallest possible denomination. A ten was the smallest, and there was only one of them. That would have to do. He cursed himself for getting into such a spot.

The door suddenly gave a heave behind him. Not a violent one, but he wasn't expecting it. It threw him forward off balance. The imperfectly grasped outspread fan of money in his hand went scattering all over the floor. The barman's head showed through the aperture. He started to say: "I don't like the way you're acting. Come on now, get out of my pla—" Then he saw the money.

Burroughs' gun had been an awkward bulk for his inside coat pocket all along. The grip was too big, it overspanned the lining. His abrupt lurch forward had shifted it. It felt as if it was about to fall out of its own weight. He clutched at it to keep it in.

The barman saw the gesture, closed in on him with a grunted "I thought so!" that might have meant nothing, or everything.

He was no Burroughs to handle, he was an ox of a man. He pinned Paine back against the wall and held him there more or less helpless. Even so, if he'd only shut up, it probably wouldn't have happened. But he made a tunnel of his mouth and bellowed: "Pol-eece! Holdup! Help!"

Paine lost the little presence of mind he had left. He became a

blurred pinwheel of hand motion, impossible to control or forestall. Something exploded against the barman's midriff, as though he'd had a firecracker tucked in under his belt.

III

The barman coughed his way down to the floor, and out of the world. Another one. Two now. Two in less than an hour. Paine didn't think the words, they seemed to flame out at him, emblazoned on the grimy washroom walls in characters of fire, like in that Biblical story.

He took a step across the prone, white-aproned form as stiffly as though he were high up on stilts. He looked out through the door crack. No one in the bar. And it probably hadn't been heard outside in the street, it had had two doors to go through.

He put the damned thing away, the thing that seemed to be spreading death around it just by being in his possession. If he hadn't brought it with him from Burroughs' house, this man would have been alive now. But if he hadn't brought it with him, he would have been apprehended for the first murder by now. Why blame the weapon, why not blame fate?

That money, all over the floor. He squatted, went for it bill by bill, counting as he went. Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty. Some of them were on one side of the corpse, some on the other; he had to cross over, not once but several times, in the course of his grisly paper chase. One was even pinned partly under him, and when he'd wangled it out, there was a swirl of blood on the edge. He grimaced, thrust it out, blotted it off. Some of the blood stayed on, of course

He had it all now, or thought he did. He couldn't stay in here another minute, he felt like he was choking. He got it all into his pocket any old way, buttoned it down. Then he eased out, this time looking behind him at what he had done, not before him. That was how he missed seeing the drunk, until it was too late and the drunk had already seen him.

The drunk was pretty far gone, but maybe not drunk enough to take a chance on. He must have weaved in quietly, while Paine was absorbed in retrieving the money. He was bending over reading the list of selections on the juke box. He raised his head before Paine could get back in again, and to keep him from seeing what lay on the floor in there Paine quickly closed the door behind him.

"Say, itsh about time," the drunk complained. "How about a little servish here?"

Paine tried to shadow his face as much as he could with the brim of his hat. "I'm not in charge here," he murmured. "I'm

only just a customer myself."

The drunk was going to be sticky. He barnacled onto Paine's lapels as he tried to slide by. "Don't gimme that. You just hung up your coat in there, you think you're quitting for the night. Well, you ain't quitting until I've had my drink."

Paine tried to shake him off without being too violent about it, and bringing on another hand-to-hand set-to. He hung on like grim death. Or rather, he hung on *to* grim death—without knowing it.

Paine fought down the flux of panic, the ultimate result of which he'd already seen twice now. Any minute some one might come in from the street. Some one sober.

"All right," he breathed heavily, "hurry up, what'll it be?"

"Thass more like it, now you're being reg'lar guy!" The drunk released him, and he went around behind the bar. "Never anything but good ole Four Roses for mine truly."

Paine snatched down a bottle at random from the shelf, handed it over bodily. "Here, help yourself. You'll have to take it outside with you. I'm—we're closing up right now."

He found a switch, threw it. It only made part of the lights go out There was no time to bother with the rest. He hustled the bottle-nursing drunk out ahead of him and pulled the door shut after the two of them, so that it would appear to be locked even if it wasn't.

The drunk started to make loud plaint, looping around on the sidewalk. "You're a fine guy. Not even a glass to drink it out of!"

Paine gave him a slight push in one direction, wheeled, and made off in the other.

The thing was, how drunk was he? Would he remember Paine, would he know him if he saw him again? Paine hurried on, spurred to a run by the night-filling hails and imprecations resounding behind him. He couldn't do it again. Three lives in an hour. He *couldn't!*

The night was fading when he turned into the little courtyard that was his own. He staggered up the stairs, but not from the two drinks he'd had, from the two deaths.

He stood outside his own door at last—3B. It seemed such a funny thing to do after killing people—fumble around in your pockets for your latchkey and fit it in, just like on other nights. He'd been an honest man when he'd left here, and now he'd come back a murderer. A double one.

He hoped Pauline was asleep. He couldn't face her right now, couldn't talk to her even if he tried. He was all in emotionally. She'd find out right away just by looking at his face, by looking in his eyes.

He eased the front door closed, tip-toed to the bedroom and looked in. She was lying there asleep. Poor kid, poor helpless kid, married to a murderer.

He went back, undressed in the outer room. Then he stayed in there. Not even stretched out on top of the sofa, but crouched beside it on the floor, heads and arms pillowed against its seat. The drums of terror kept pounding. They kept saying, *What am I going to do now?*

The sun seemed to shoot up the sky, it got to the top so fast. He opened his eyes and it was all the way up. He went to the door and brought in the paper. It wasn't in the morning papers yet, they were made up too soon after midnight. It would be in the evening ones.

He turned around and Pauline had come out, was picking up his things. "All over the floor, never saw a man like you."

He said, "Don't—" and stabbed his hand toward her. But it was already too late. He'd jammed the bills in so haphazardly the second time, in the bar, that they made a noticeable bulge in his back pocket. She opened it and took them out, and some of them dribbled to the floor.

She just stared. "Dick!" She was incredulous, overjoyed. "Not Burroughs? Don't tell me you finally—"

"No!" The name went through him like a red-hot skewer. "I didn't go anywhere near him. He had nothing to do with it!"

She nodded corroboratively. "I thought not, because—"

He wouldn't let her finish. He stepped closed to her, took her by both shoulders. "Don't mention his name to me again. I don't want to hear his name again. I got it from someone else."

"Who?"

He knew he'd have to answer her, or she'd suspect something. He swallowed, groped blindly for a name. "Charlie Chalmers!" he blurted out.

"But he refused you only last week!"

"Well, he changed his mind." He turned on her tormentedly. "Don't ask me any more questions, Pauline. I can't stand it! I haven't slept all night. There it is, that's all that matters." He took his trousers from her, went into the bathroom to dress. He'd hidden Burroughs' gun the night before in the built-in laundry hamper in there. He wished he'd hidden the money with it. He put the gun back in the pocket where he'd carried it last night. If she touched him there—

He combed his hair. The drums were a little quieter now, but he knew they'd come back again. This was just the lull before the storm.

He came out again, and she was putting cups on the table. She looked worried now. She sensed there was something

wrong. She was afraid to ask him, he could see, maybe afraid of what she would find out. He couldn't sit there eating, just as though this was any other day. Any minute someone might come here after him.

He passed by the window. Suddenly he stiffened, gripped the curtain. "What's that man doing down there?" She came up behind him. "Standing there talking to the janitor."

"Why, Dick, what harm is there in that? A dozen people a day stop and chat with—"

He edged back a step behind the frame: "He's looking up at our windows! Did you see that? They both turned and looked up this way! Get back!" His arm swept her around behind him.

"Why should we? We haven't done anything."

"They're coming in the entrance to this wing! They're on their way up here."

"Dick, why are you acting this way. What's happened?"

"Go in the bedroom and wait there." He was a coward, yes. But there are varieties. At least he wasn't a coward that hid behind a woman's skirts. He prodded her into the bedroom ahead of him. Then he gripped her shoulder a minute. "Don't ask any questions. If you love me, stay in here until they go away again."

He closed the door on her frightened, importunate face. He cracked the gun. "Two left in it. I can get them both," he thought, "if I'm careful. I've got to."

It was going to happen again.

The jangle of the doorbell battery steeled him. He moved with deadly slowness toward the door, feet flat and firm upon the floor. He picked up the newspaper from the table on his way by, rolled it into a funnel, thrust his hand and the gun down into it. The pressure of his arm against his side was sufficient to keep it furled.

It was as though he had just been reading and had carelessly tucked the paper under his arm. It hid the gun effectively as long as he kept it slanting down.

He freed the latch and shifted slowly back with the door, bisected by its edge, the unarmed half of him all that showed. The janitor came into view first, as the gap widened. He was on the outside. The man next to him had a derby hat riding the back of his head, a bristly mustache. He was rotating a cigar between his teeth and he looked like—one of those who come after you.

The janitor said with a scarcely veiled insolence. "Paine, I've got a man here looking for a flat. I'm going to show him yours, seeing as how it'll be available from today on. Any objections?"

Paine swayed there limply against the door like a garment bag hanging on a hook, as they brushed by. "No," he whispered deflatedly. "No, go right ahead."

He held the door open to make sure their descent continued all the way down to the bottom. As soon as he'd closed it, Pauline caught him anxiously by the arm.

"Why wouldn't you let me tell them we're able to pay the arrears now, and are staying? Why did you squeeze my arm like that when I started to?"

"Because we're not staying, and I don't want them to know we've got the money. I don't want anyone to know. We're getting out of here."

"Dick, what is it? Have you done something you shouldn't?"

"Don't ask me. Listen, if you love me, don't ask any questions. I'm—in a little trouble. I've got to get out of here. Never mind why. If you don't want to come with me, I'll go alone."

"Anywhere you go, I'll go." Her eyes misted. "But can't it be straightened out?"

Two men dead beyond recall. He gave a bitter smile. "No."

"Is it bad?"

IV

He shut his eyes, took a minute to answer. "It's bad, Pauline. That's all you need to know. That's all I want you to know. I've got to get out of here as fast as I can. From one minute to the next it may be too late. Let's get started now. They'll be here to dispossess us sometime, today, anyway. That'll be a good excuse. We won't wait, we'll leave now."

She went in to get ready. She took so long doing it he nearly went crazy. She didn't seem to realize how urgent it was. She wasted as much time deciding what to take and what to leave behind as though they were going on a week-end jaunt to the country. He kept going to the bedroom door, urging, "Pauline, hurry! Faster, Pauline!"

She cried a good deal. She was an obedient wife. She didn't ask him any more questions about what the trouble was. She just cried about it without knowing what it was.

He was down on hands and knees beside the window, in the position of a man looking for a collar button under a dresser, when she finally came out with the small bag she'd packed. He turned a stricken face to her.

"Too late. I can't leave with you. Someone's already watching the place."

She inclined herself to his level, edged up beside him.

"Look straight over to the other side of the street. See him? He hasn't moved for the past ten minutes. People don't just stand like that for no reason—"

"He may be waiting for someone."

"He is," he murmured somberly. *"Me."*

"But you can't be sure."

"No, but if I put it to the test by showing myself, it'll be too late by the time I find out. You

go by yourself, ahead of me."

"No, if you stay, let me stay with you."

"I'm not staying, I can't! I'll follow you and meet you somewhere. But it'll be easier for us to leave one at a time than both together. I can slip over the roof or go out the basement way. He won't stop you. They're not looking for you. You go now and wait for me."

His hand tightened on her shoulder. "No, I have a better idea. Here's what you do. You get two tickets and get on the train at the downtown terminal without waiting for me." He was separating some of the money, thrusting it into her reluctant hand while he spoke. "Now listen closely. Get two tickets to Montreal—"

An added flicker of dismay showed in her eyes. "We're leaving the country?"

When you've committed murder you have no country any more.

"We have to, Pauline. Now there's an eight o'clock limited for there every night. It leaves the downtown terminal at eight sharp. It stops for five minutes at the station uptown, at twenty after. That's where I'll get on. Make sure you're on it or we'll miss each other. Keep a seat for me next to you in the day coach."

She clung to him despairingly. "No, no, I'm afraid, you won't come. Something'll happen. You'll miss it. If I leave you now I may never see you again. I'll find myself making the trip up there alone, without you."

He tried to reassure her, pressing her hands between his. "Pauline, I give you my word of honor." That was no good, he was a murderer now. "Pauline, I swear to you."

"Here—on this. Take a solemn oath on this, otherwise I won't go." She took out a small carnelian cross she carried in her handbag, attached to a little gold chain—one of the few things they hadn't pawned. She palmed it, pressed the flat of his right hand over it. They looked into each other's eyes with sacramental intensity.

His voice trembled. "I swear nothing will keep me from that train. I'll join you on it no matter what happens, no matter who tries to stop me. Rain or shine, dead or alive, I'll meet you aboard it at eight-twenty tonight!"

She put it away. Their lips brushed briefly but fervently.

"Hurry up now," he urged. "He's still there. Don't look at him on your way past. If he should stop you and ask who you are, give another name."

He went to the outside door with her, watched her start down the stairs. The last thing she whispered up was: "Dick, be careful for my sake. Don't let anything happen to you between now and tonight!"

He went back to the window and crouched down, cheekbones to sill. She came out under him in a minute or two. She knew enough not to look up at their windows, although the impulse must have been strong. The man was still standing over there. He didn't seem to notice her. He even looked off in another direction.

She passed from view behind the building line; their windows were set in on the court that indented it. Paine wondered if he'd ever see her again. Sure he would, he had to. He realized that it would be better for her if he didn't. It wasn't fair to enmesh her in his own doom.

But he'd sworn an oath and he meant to keep it.

Two, three minutes ticked by. The cat-and-mouse play continued. He crouched motionless by the window, the other man stood motionless across the street. She must be all the way down at the corner by now. She'd take the bus there, to go downtown. She might have to wait a few minutes for one to come along, she might still be in sight. But if the man below was going to go after her, accost her, he would have started by now. He wouldn't keep standing there.

Then, as Paine watched, he did start. He looked toward the corner, threw away something he'd been smoking, began to move purposefully in that direction. There was no mistaking the fact that he was looking *at* or *after* some one, by the intent way he held his head. He passed from sight.

Paine began to breathe hot and fast. "I'll kill him. If he touches her, tries to stop her, I'll kill him right out in the open street in broad daylight."

It was still fear, cowardice, that was at work, although it was almost unrecognizable as such by now.

He felt for the gun, left his hand on it, inside the breast of his coat, then straightened to his feet, and ran out of the flat and down the stairs. He cut across the little set-in paved courtyard at a sprint, flashed out past the sheltering building line, turned down in the direction they had both taken.

Then as the panorama before him registered he staggered to an abrupt stop, stood taking it in. It offered three component but separate points of interest. He only noticed two at first. One was the bus down at the corner. The front third of it protruded, door open. He caught a glimpse of Pauline's back as she was in the act of stepping in, unaccompanied and unmolested.

The door closed automatically, and it swept across the vista and disappeared at the other side. On the other side of the street but nearer at hand, the man who had been keeping the long vigil had

stopped a second time, was gesticulating angrily to a woman laden with parcels whom he had joined. Both voices were so raised they reached Paine without any trouble.

"A solid half hour I've been standing there, and no one home to let me in!"

"Well, is it my fault you went off without your key? Next time take it with you!"

Nearer at hand still, on Paine's own side of the street, a lounging figure detached itself from the building wall and impinged on his line of vision. The man had been only yards away the whole time, but Paine's eyes had been trained on the distance, he'd failed to notice him until now.

His face suddenly loomed out at Paine. His eyes bored into Paine's with unmistakable intent. He didn't look like one of those that come to get you. He acted like it. He thumbed his vest pocket for something, some credential or identification. He said in a soft, slurring voice that held an inflexible command in it.

"Just a minute there, buddy. You're name's Paine, ain't it? I want to see you."

Paine didn't have to give his muscular coordination any signal; it acted for him automatically. He felt his legs carry him back into the shelter of the courtyard in a sort of slithering jump. He was at the foot of the entrance stairs before the other man had even rounded the building line. He was in behind his own door before the remorselessly slow but plainly audible tread had started up toward him.

The man seemed to be coming up after him alone. Didn't he know Paine had a gun? He'd find out. He was up on the landing now. He seemed to know which floor to stop at, which door to come to a halt before. Probably the janitor had told him. Then why hadn't he come sooner? Maybe he'd been waiting for some one to join him, and Paine had upset the plan by showing himself below.

Paine realized he'd trapped himself by returning here. He should have gone on up to the roof, and over. But the natural instinct of the hunted, whether four-legged or two, is to find a hole, to get in out of the open. It was too late now, he was right out there on the other side of the door. Paine tried to keep his harried breathing silent. To his own ears it grated like sand sifted through a sieve.

He didn't ring the bell and he didn't knock. Instead he tried the knob, in a half-furtive, half-badgering way. A swirl of panic began to churn in Paine again. He couldn't let him get in; he couldn't let him get away, either. He'd only go and bring others back with him.

Paine pointed the muzzle of

the gun to the crack of the door, midway between the two hinges. With his other hand he reached out for the catch that controlled the latch, released it.

Now if the crazy fool wanted to die, he should open this door.

The man had kept on trying the knob. Now the door slipped in past the frame. The crack at the other side widened in accompaniment as it swung around. Paine ran the gun bore up it, even with the side of his head.

The crash was thunderous. The man fell into the flat, with only his feet and ankles outside

V

Paine came out from behind the door, dragged his third victim the rest of the way in, closed it. He stopped, his hands probing here and there. He found a gun, a heftier, more businesslike one than his. He took that. He found a billfold heavy with cash. He took that, too. He fished for the badge, drawn by a sort of morbid curiosity.

There wasn't any in the vest pocket he'd seen him reach toward downstairs. There was only a block of cheaply printed cards. *Star Finance Company. Loans up to any amount without security.*

So he hadn't been one, after all. He'd evidently been some kind of a loan shark, drawn by the scent of Paine's difficulties.

Three times now in less than four hours.

Instinctively Paine knew he was doomed now, if he hadn't before. There wasn't any more of the consternation he had felt the first two times. He kept buying off time with bullets. That was all it was now. And the rate of interest kept going higher, the time limit kept shortening. There wasn't even any time to feel sorry.

Doors had begun opening outside in the hall, voices were calling back and forth: "What was that—a shot?"

"It sounded like it came from 3-B."

He'd have to get out now, right away, or he'd be trapped again. And this time for good. He shifted the body out of the line of vision from outside, buttoned up his jacket and took a deep breath. Then he opened the door, stepped out, and closed it after him.

Each of the other doors was open with somebody peering out. They hadn't ganged up yet in the middle of the hall. Most of them were women, anyway. One or two edged timidly back when they saw him emerge.

"It wasn't anything," he said. "I dropped a big clay jug in there just now."

He knew they didn't believe him. They hadn't heard any breakage.

He started down the stairs. At the third step he looked over the side, saw the cop coming up. Somebody had already phoned, or

sent out word. He reversed, flashed around his own landing, and on up from there.

The cop's voice said, "Stop where you are!" He was coming on fast now. But Paine was going just as fast.

The cop's voice shouted: "Get inside, all of you! I'm going to shoot!"

Doors began slapping shut like firecrackers. Paine switched over abruptly to the rail, and fired first.

The cop jolted, but he grabbed the rail and stayed up. He didn't die as easy as the others. He fired four times before he lost his gun. He missed three times and hit Paine the fourth time

The bullet went in Paine's chest on the right side, and knocked him across the width of the staircase. His chest flamed with pain, and then it didn't hurt so much. He found he could get up again. Maybe because he had to. He went back and looked down. The cop had folded over the railing and gone sliding down it as far as the next turn, the way a kid does on a banister. Only sidewise, on his stomach. Then he dropped off onto the landing, rolled over and lay still, looking up at Paine without seeing him.

Four.

Paine went on up to the roof, but not fast, not easily any more. The steps were like an escalator going the other way, trying to carry him down with them. He went across to the roof of the next flat, and down through that, and came out on the street behind his own.

The two buildings were twins, set back-to-back. The prowl car was already screeching to a stop, out of sight back there at his own doorway. He could hear it over the roofs, on this side.

He was wet across the hip. Then he was wet as far down as the knee. And he hadn't been hit in those places, so he knew he must be bleeding a lot. He saw a taxi and waved to it, and it backed up and got him. It hurt getting in, he couldn't answer for a minute when the driver asked him where to. His sock felt sticky under his shoe now, from the blood.

He wished he could stop the bleeding until eight-twenty. He had to meet Pauline on the train, and that was a long time to stay alive.

The driver had taken him off the street and around the corner without waiting for him to be more explicit. He asked him where to a second time.

Paine said, "What time is it?"

"Quarter to six, cap."

Life was awfully short—and awfully sweet. "Take me to the park and drive me around in it." He knew that was the wisest thing he could have said. The park was the one place they wouldn't look for him.

He thought, "I've always

wanted to drive around in the park. Not go anywhere, just drive around in it slow. I never had the money to do it before."

He had it now.

The bullet must still be in him. His back didn't hurt, so it hadn't come out. Something must have stopped it. The bleeding had let up. He could feel it drying on him. The pain kept trying to pull him over double though.

The driver noticed it, said: "Are you hurt?"

"No, I've got kind of a cramp, that's all."

"Want me to take you to a drugstore?"

Paine smiled weakly. "No, I guess I'll let it ride."

Sundown in the park. So peaceful, so prosaic. Long shadows across the winding paths. A belated nursemaid or two pushing a perambulator homeward. A loiterer or two lingering on the benches in the dusk. A little lake, with a rowboat on it—a sailor on shore leave rowing his sweetheart around. A lemonade and popcorn man trundling his wagon home for the day.

Stars were coming out. At times the trees were outlined black against the copper western sky. At times the whole thing blurred and he felt as if he were being carried around in a maelstrom. Each time he fought through and cleared his senses again. He had to make that train.

"Let me know when it gets to be eight o'clock," he said, urgently.

"Sure, cap. It's only quarter to seven now."

A groan was torn from Paine as they hit a lumpy spot in the driveway. He tried to keep it low, but the driver must have heard it above the sound of the engine.

"Still hurts you, huh?" he inquired sympathetically. "You oughta get it fixed up." He began to talk about his own indigestion. "Take me for instance. I'm okay until I eat tamales and root beer. Anytime I eat tamales and root beer—"

He shut up abruptly. He was staring fixedly into the rear-sight mirror. Paine warily clutched his lapels together over his darkened shirt front. He knew it was too late to do any good.

The driver didn't say anything for a long time. He was thinking it over, and he was a slow thinker. Then finally, he suggested offhandedly, "Care to listen to the radio?"

Paine knew what he was out for. He thought, "He wants to see if he can get anything on me over it."

"May as well," the driver urged. "It's thrown in with the fare, won't cost you nothing extra."

"Go ahead," Paine consented. He wanted to see if he could hear anything himself.

It made the pain a little easier to bear, like music always does. "I used to dance too," thought

Paine, listening to the tune, "before I started killing people."

It didn't come over for a long time. And then only after a lot of commonplace stuff.

"A city-wide alarm is out for Richard Paine. Paine, who was about to be dispossessed from his flat, shot and killed a finance company employee. Then when Officer Harold Carey answered the alarm, he met the same fate. However, before giving up his life in the performance of duty, the patrolman succeeded in seriously wounding the desperate man. A trail of blood left by the fugitive on the stairs leading up to the roof over which he made good his escape seems to confirm this. He's still at large but probably won't be for long. Watch out for this man. He's dangerous."

"Not if you leave him alone, let him get to that train," Paine thought despairfully, eyeing the suddenly rigid silhouette in front of him. "I'll have to do something about him—now—I guess."

It had come through at a bad time for the driver. Some of the main driveways through the park were heavily trafficked and pretty well lighted. He could have got help from another car.

But it happened to come through right while they were on a dark, lonely bypass with not another machine in sight. Around the next turn the bypass rejoined one of the heavy-traffic arteries. You could hear the hum of traffic from where they were driving.

"Pull over here," Paine ordered. He'd had the gun out moments already, intending only to clip the driver with it, stun him and tie him up until after eight-twenty.

You could tell by the way the driver pulled his breath in short that he'd been wise to Paine ever since the news flash and had only been waiting until they got near one of the exits. He was shaking now and suddenly braked. Then just as suddenly bolted out, and tried to duck into the underbrush near the pavement.

Paine knew he would have to get him and get him quick, before he alerted the park division. They could cork up the entrances pretty fast, and it would have been madness to get out and give chase.

He pointed low, aiming for the man's legs, trying just to bring him down.

But the driver had tripped over something and gone flat, a moment ahead of the trigger fall. The bullet must have ploughed into his back instead. He was inert when Paine got out to him, but still alive. Eyes open, and staring, as though his nerve centers had been paralyzed.

VI

Paine could hardly stand up himself, but he managed to drag the helpless man over to the cab, and somehow got him in. He took the cap, and put it on his

own head with shaking fingers.

He could drive—or at least he'd been able to before he was dying. He got under the wheel and took the machine slowly on its way. The sound of the shot must have been lost out in the open, or else mistaken for a backfire for the stream of traffic was rolling obliviously by when he slipped into it unnoticed.

He left it again at the earliest opportunity, turned off at the next dark, empty lane that offered itself.

He stopped once more, made his way to the back door, to see how the cabman was. He wanted to help him in some way if he could. Maybe leave him in front of a hospital.

It was too late. The driver's eyes were closed. He was already dead by this time.

Five.

It didn't have any meaning any more. After all, to the dying death is nothing.

"I'll see you again in an hour or so," he said.

He got the driver's coat off him and shrouded him with it, to keep the pale gleam of his face from peering up through the gloom of the cab's interior, in case anyone got too close to the window. He was unequal to the task of getting him out again and leaving him behind in the park. The lights of some passing car might have picked him up too soon. And it seemed more fitting to let him repose in his own cab anyway.

It was ten to eight now. He'd better start for the station. He might be held up by lights on the way, and the train only stopped a few minutes at the uptown station.

He had to rejoin the main stream of traffic to get out of the park. He hugged the outside of the driveway and trundled along. He went off the road several times. Not because he couldn't drive, but because his senses fogged. He pulled himself and the cab out of it each time.

"Train, eight-twenty," he waved before his mind like a red lantern. But like a spendthrift he was using up years of his life in minutes, and pretty soon he was going to run short.

Once an alarm car passed him, shrieking by, taking a shortcut through the park from one side of the city to the other. He wondered if it were himself they were after—some false alarm or other. He didn't wonder very hard. Nothing mattered much any more. Only eight-twenty—train—

He kept folding up slowly over the wheel and each time it touched his chest, the machine would swerve crazily as though it felt the pain too. Twice, three times, his fenders were grazed, and he heard faint voices swearing at him from another world, the world he was leaving behind. He wondered if they'd call him names

like that if they knew he was dying.

Another thing, he couldn't maintain a steady flow of pressure on the accelerator. The pressure would die out each time, as when current is failing, and the machine would begin drifting to a stop. This happened just as he was leaving the park, crossing the big circular exit plaza.

It was controlled by lights and he stalled on a green out in the middle. There was a cop in control on a platform. The cop shot the whistle out of his own mouth blowing it so hard at him. He nearly flung himself off the platform waving him on.

Paine just sat there, helpless.

The cop was coming over to him, raging like a lion. Paine wasn't afraid because of what the back of his cab held. He was long past that kind of fear. But if this cop did anything to keep him from that eight-twenty train—

He reached down finally and gripped his own leg by the ankle. He lifted it an inch or two clear of the floor, then let it fall back again. The cab started. It was ludicrous. But then some of the aspects of death often are.

The cop let him go, only because to have detained him longer would have created a worse traffic snarl than there was already.

He was nearly there now. Just a straight run cross-town, then a short one north. It was good he remembered this, because he couldn't see the street plates any more. Sometimes the buildings seemed to lean over above him as though they were about to topple down on him. Sometimes he seemed to be climbing a steep hill, where he knew there wasn't any. But he knew that was just because he was swaying around in the driver's seat.

The same thing happened again, a few blocks further on, directly in front of a large, swank apartment house. The doorman came flying out, blowing a whistle. He caught hold of the cab's rear door and swung it wide before Paine could stop him, even though the cab was still rolling. Two women in evening dress came hurrying out of the entrance behind him, one in advance of the other.

"No—taken!" Paine kept trying to say. But was too weak to make his voice heard, or else the women ignored it. And he couldn't push his foot down for a moment.

The foremost one shrieked, "Hurry, Mother. Donald'll never forgive me. I promised him seven-thirty—"

She got one foot on the cab doorstep. Then she just stood there, transfixed. She must have seen what was inside. It was better lighted here than in the park.

Paine tore the cab away from her, open door and all and left her standing there petrified, out in the middle of the street in her

long white satin gown. She was too stunned even to scream.

And then he got there at last. He got a momentary respite too. Things cleared a little. Like the lights going up in a theatre when the show is over, before the house darkens for the night.

The uptown station was built-in under a viaduct that carried the overhead tracks across the city streets. He couldn't stop in front of it; no parking was allowed. And there were long lines of cabs preempting the curb on both sides of the no-parking zone. He turned the corner into the little dead-end alley that separated the viaduct from the adjoining buildings. There was a side entrance to the station looking out on it.

Four minutes. It was due in another four minutes. It had already left Grand Central and was on its way uptown, hurtling somewhere between the two points. He thought, "I better get started. I may have a hard time making it." He wondered if he could stand up at all.

He just wanted to stay where he was, and let eternity wash over him. Three minutes. A cop came into sight, turned down into the alley. Have to wait now until he went by, or he'd notice there was something wrong with him. What was he coming into this alley for? It didn't lead anywhere. It was a dead-end, just an easement alongside the station.

The cop was up to the cab window now. His eyes flicked into the interior. His coat sleeve brushed the door handle, he was so close. His glance must have missed the cab floor by sixteenths of inches, just failed to reach it.

His eyes swept blankly over Paine's face as he came abreast of the driver's seat. He was up as far as the front fender before he remembered to say:

"Come on, get her outta there, now! You guys ain't supposed to come in here!" Then he went on, turning into a little side door that led to the station washroom, just past the entrance.

Two minutes. It was coming in overhead, he could hear it rumbling and ticking along the steel viaduct, then sighing to a long-drawn-out stop.

That sidewalk looked awfully wide, from the cab door to the station entrance. He brought up the last dregs of vitality in him, broke away from the cab, started out, zigzagging and going down lower at the knees every minute. The station door helped pull him up straight again. He got into the waiting room, and it was so big he knew he'd never be able to cross it. One minute left. So near and yet so far.

The starter was calling it already. "Montreal express—eight-twenty! Pittsfield, Burlington, Rousse's Point, Montre-yall! Bo-o-oard!"

There were rows of lengthwise

benches at hand, and they helped him bridge the otherwise insurmountable length of the waiting-room. He dropped into the outside seat in the first row, pulled himself together a little, scrambled five seats over, toppled into another seat. He repeated the process until he was within reach of the ticket barrier. But time was going, the train was going, life was going fast.

Forty-five seconds left. The last dilatory passengers had already gone up. There were two ways of getting up, a long flight of stairs, and an escalator.

He wavered toward the escalator, made it. He wouldn't have been able to get by the ticket taker but for his hack-man's cap —an eventuality he and Pauline hadn't foreseen.

"Just meeting a party," he mumbled almost unintelligibly, and the slow treadmill started to carry him up.

A whistle blew upstairs on the track platform. Axels and wheelbases gave a preliminary creak of motion.

It was all he could do to keep his feet even on the escalator. There wasn't anyone in back of him, and if he once went over he was going to go plunging all the way down to the bottom of the long chute. He dug his nails into the ascending hand-belts at both sides, hung on like grim life.

There was a hubbub starting up outside on the street somewhere. He could hear a cop's whistle blowing frenziedly.

A voice shouted: "Which way'd he go?"

Another answered: "I seen him go in the station."

They'd at last found what was in the cab.

A moment after the descending waiting-room ceiling had cut off his view, he heard a spate of running feet come surging into the station from all directions. But he hadn't time to think of that now. He was out on the open platform upstairs at last. Cars were skimming swiftly by. A vestibule-door was coming, with a conductor just lifting himself into it. Paine went toward it, body low, one arm straight out as if in a grotesque salute.

He gave a wordless cry. The conductor turned, saw him. There was a tug, and he was suddenly sprawled inside on the vestibule floor. The conductor gave him a scathing look, pulled the folding steps in after him and slammed the door.

Too late, a cop, a redcap and a couple of taxi drivers, came spilling out of the escalator shed. He could hear them yelling a car-length back but the trainmen back there were refusing to open the doors. Suddenly the long, lighted platform snuffed out, and the station was gone.

They probably didn't think they'd lost him, but they had. Sure, they'd phone ahead, they'd

stop the train to have him taken off at Harmon, where it changed locomotives. But they wouldn't get him. He wouldn't be on it. Just his body.

Each man knows when he's going to die. Paine knew he wouldn't even live long enough to cross the Harlem River.

He went staggering down a long, brightly lighted aisle. He could hardly see their faces any more. But *she'd* know him; it would be all right. The aisle ended, and he had to cross another vestibule. He fell down on his knees, for lack of seat backs to support himself by. He squirmed up again somehow, got into the next car. Another long, lighted aisle, miles of it.

He was nearly at the end, he could see another vestibule coming. Or maybe that was the door to eternity. Suddenly, from the last seat of all, a hand darted out and claimed him, and there was Pauline's face looking anxiously up at him. He twisted like a wrung-out dish cloth, and dropped into the empty seat beside her.

"You were going to pass right by," she whispered.

"I couldn't see you clearly, the lights are flickering so."

She looked up at them in surprise, as though for her they were steady.

"I kept my word," he breathed. "I made the train. But oh, I'm tired—and now I'm going to sleep." He started to slip over sidewise toward her. His head dropped onto her lap.

She had been holding her handbag on it, and his fall displaced it. It dropped to the floor, opened and everything in it spilled out around her feet.

His glazing eyes opened for one last time, and centered feebly on the little packet of bills, with a rubber band around them, that had rolled out with everything else.

"Pauline, all that money—where'd you get that much? I only gave you enough to buy the train tickets—"

"Burroughs gave it to me. It's the two hundred and fifty we were talking about for so long. I knew in the end you'd never go near him and ask for it, so I went to him myself—last night right after you left the house. He handed it over willingly, without a word. I tried to tell you that this morning, but you wouldn't let me mention his name. . . ."

night work

by William Campbell Gault

When a smiling cop turns angry—a killer would be better off dead. But the stakes were high, and—a gambler can't change his spots.

HE'D BEEN ON the force a year, now, and was doing all right. There'd been some doubt about him, at Headquarters, but he'd scored high in his examination and there'd been a recommendation from a quarter the Chief didn't like to ignore. He was young. And you shouldn't hold a young man's past against him.

So Joe Leeds, at twenty-three, was working for a little under three hundred a month, cost of living bonus, and all. He'd made ten times that in one night, over the felt, when he was twenty-one. But he didn't regret his decision to give up gambling and join the police force.

He liked his job. He patrolled the area between Hampton and Wright, between Adams and Chestnut. A residential area, almost suburban, and he was well liked in the neighborhood. It was good, the citizens said, to see a smiling cop for a change.

He liked the kids, too, at the Wright Street School. Sassy, a lot of them, and they gave him a bad time occasionally. But they got along and when Joe stopped smiling and raised his voice they knew it was time to quit the non-

William Campbell Gault has a positive genius for peeling away the smooth outer rind of the criminal mentality at work—revealing the sinister network beneath. Seldom has the author of SWEET ROLLS AND MURDER *written a more powerful short story than this freshly-minted new yarn of his.*

sense. With the possible exception of Tommy Hart.

When the kids waited beside Joe at the Wright Street crossing for traffic to change Tommy always had some fresh remarks to make.

"Let's go, let's go!" Tommy would call loudly. "How about stopping that traffic, Joe? Our lunch is getting cold. We haven't got all day." Then he'd dash ahead of the other kids, before Joe gave the word to go.

When traffic was finally stopped and the other kids trooped across obediently, Tommy would already be on the playground, throwing a football or a baseball or a snowball, as the season warranted.

Tommy's father had told Joe, "If Tommy gives you any trouble, take him across your knee. There are times when nothing else works with Tommy."

Joe Leeds decided that would be the last resort. Joe had a lot of regard for Tommy, despite the size of his mouth. He knew there'd be some way to get to the youngster, make a buddy of him.

He gave Tommy a long and serious talking to one afternoon, and it seemed to score. Tommy took it quietly, with understanding in his blue eyes, and Tommy called him "Officer Leeds" when they parted. Things were going to be all right, Joe decided.

But the next morning, when he held them up for a line of cars, Tommy was the same as usual.

"All right, all right," Tommy called, "you want us to be late for school, Joe?"

Joe ignored him, decided to try another line of attack.

"Let's go, let's go," Tommy called. "We haven't got all day."

Joe said, "I'll see you after school, Tommy. We're going home to talk to your dad."

"He doesn't get home until six," Tommy said, grinning at him.

"All right. I'll be over after supper, then," Joe said. He stopped the traffic, and filed them across . . .

At noon Tommy wasn't in the crowd of kids waiting at the curb. But as Joe waved them across the street, he saw Tommy coming slowly out of the school entrance.

Joe could see that the boy was worried as he came along the walk. When he stopped in front of Joe he looked up anxiously, said, "Can we make a deal, Joe?"

"Maybe," Joe said, his face expressionless.

"You don't come over after supper, and I'll stop acting up. How's that?"

"Sounds all right," Joe agreed. "You'll never say, 'Let's go, let's go' again? You'll never give me any backtalk?"

"Never," Tommy said.

Joe grinned at him. "Okay, Tommy, it's a deal. Now, scoot across!"

There was no traffic but Tommy

looked both ways before he scooted.

He was halfway across when the Cadillac came gunning out of Adams, ignoring the stop sign, its tires screaming, its big motor roaring. Joe thought it was going to tip over it curved so abruptly as it turned into Wright. He was hoping it would tip over because Tommy was in its path if it didn't.

Tommy froze there in the middle of the street, paralyzed by fright, unable to scream or run. Then the big car hit him.

There was a sickening thud as Tommy hurtled through the air. The car didn't stop, didn't even slow its pace. It was still accelerating as it disappeared around the corner a block up. Joe had caught the first two digits of its license plate only for he tried to get a good look at the man behind the wheel also. But he got only a glimpse of a crouched, hatted figure and not even that much of the figure in the rear seat.

The car had hit Tommy hard, thrown him against the curb. Tommy Hart would never bother Joe again.

The Chief said, "I can't see how anybody could assume you were negligent, Joe. Traffic was clear on Wright and the car should have stopped at the arterial. Your report's clear and absolves you completely."

"The kids are my responsibility," Joe said stubbornly. "And Tommy was a kind of special responsibility. I'm sure it was murder, sir."

"Manslaughter," the Chief said. "Murder needs a motive, Joe. We've got the boys working on it. When we make the arrest we'll throw the book at the driver. But that's not your province. You handle your beat and we'll handle the rest."

"But—"

The Chief raised his hand. "That's an order, Joe. I respect your feeling about this, but that's an order."

They found there was no local Cadillac with a license number starting with 1-5. But they checked the stolen car list and discovered a set of missing plates with those first two digits. They'd been stolen from a car parked in dead storage at a west side garage.

It was out of Joe's province, as the Chief had said, but Joe made a note of the garage's address.

That afternoon Les Gargan was found dead in his eight room house on Adams. Gargan's wife had been away from home for a few days, and she'd found the body when she returned. There was a bullet hole through Les and they dug the bullet out of the woodwork in the room where he lay.

That was two blocks from the corner of Wright and Adams. Joe had known Les well, had once won over two thousand dollars

from him in one night of stud. Joe had liked Les and he went to see his widow the night after the funeral.

She was a beautiful girl. June Wilson was her name when Les married her out of a featured spot in Tony Valentine's Revue. Tony was noted for the lovelies he picked.

She didn't seem too broken up over Gargan's death, or perhaps she was exercising admirable control. Control was one thing Tony insisted upon in his girls.

She told Joe, "Les and I weren't getting along too well. But it was a horrible shock to find him like that." She shuddered. Then she said, "Drink, Joe?"

"Scotch would be all right, with water," he said.

She mixed it and handed it to him. "You're looking fit."

It was after hours and he wasn't wearing the uniform. He was wearing a two hundred dollar suit and a twenty dollar tie.

"I'm outdoors a lot," he said. "You know about any trouble Les was having?"

She was measuring out her own Scotch, and Joe judged it to be a triple jolt. Her hand was steady. "Trouble? Les was the kind of boy who made it a point to avoid trouble as much as possible." She took a sip of her drink, met Joe's gaze candidly.

"He was," Joe agreed. "Les never liked trouble. He must have left you pretty well fixed, June."

She smiled at him. "You're on the nosy side tonight aren't you, Joe?"

"Sorry," he said. "I kind of liked Les. You were out of town when it happened, weren't you?"

She gazed at him for seconds without speaking. Then she said, "Look, Joe, I'm glad to see you. Or was. But you're making a noise like a cop. And I just happened to remember a silly rumor I heard some time ago."

"Rumor?"

"Mmmm-hmmm. Somebody said you'd joined the force."

"So? You've nothing to fear from the law, have you?"

"Not when a cop comes to me openly. You came as a friend, Joe."

"All right, now I'm coming as a cop. And a friend of that kid who was killed. And I'd like to know about Les' enemies."

She met his gaze evenly, her face suddenly hard. "He didn't have any."

"He must have had at least one," Joe said. He rose. "But I'm not here to heckle you. I expected your cooperation."

She looked thoughtful, appeared about to say something. Then her face resumed its hardness and she said, "Drop in any time, Joe." She walked to the door with him. "That is—as a friend."

At the door Joe told her, "It's always the smart ones who make the really dumb moves. You've come a long way from the chorus,

June, just by using your head."

"And keeping my nose clean," she said. "Good-night, Joe."

He went down to his car and she still stood on the porch, watching him. He had a hunch she could have helped him.

But she said nothing as he got into the car and drove off.

He went directly to the west side garage where the plates had been stolen. It was a long, one-story building on Hanover, with a set of pumps on the curb and fronted with plate glass windows.

Joe had his badge with him and he flashed it for the benefit of the lone night attendant, a youth of about twenty.

"I'd like to check your customer list," Joe told him.

"We haven't got any list," the boys said. "We've got a record of the people who park here, though, if that's any help."

"That'll do. And a list of your employees, including any who quit in the last month."

The youth looked at him suspiciously. "The police department's got all that."

Joe got tough. "Have they? Didn't the badge look official to you? You want another look at it?"

The youth said, "The records are in the office. Over here."

Joe followed him to a glassed-in corner of the garage. He sat at the desk while the attendant brought the books over, and the time cards.

There were no names in the books that rang any bells with him. Nor in the time cards. But it didn't seem logical that a stranger could come into an open garage like this, and steal a set of plates.

He left the garage and drove downtown to Tony Valentine's theatre-restaurant on 40th, a better-than-average night spot with a huge neon heart above the entrance, over the name *Valentine's.*

Tony was in his office. He waved Joe to a chair and said, "It's been a long time, Joe." He was a short, stocky man with a square face.

"What do you know about June Gargan?" Joe asked.

"Good shape, good voice, lot of sex appeal. Kind of smart, too, for a dame. Knows her way around."

"How long did she work for you?"

"About a year in the chorus, then I featured her for a couple months. Then Les took her out of circulation."

"Any boy friends?"

Tony shrugged, studied Joe. "What is this? Is it about the murder, Joe? You digging into that?"

"Some. Les was a friend of mine."

"I read the papers," Tony said. "I saw your name in the papers, Joe, when that kid was hit. You're a cop, now, I see."

"That's right," Joe nodded.

"Patrolman," Tony said. "So, maybe this is all on your own. You couldn't have been promoted to the plainclothes squad so fast, not in this town, Joe."

"On my own," Joe agreed. "You want to help me, Tony?"

"If I can. But I've already told the law all I know about June Gargan. About Les, I knew nothing excepting that he was a gambler. I didn't tell them that. They knew it. Everybody knew Les."

"Everybody," Joe said. "But how many people didn't like him, that's what I'm trying to find out."

"Some of the boys he beat at cards, maybe. Outside of that, I couldn't even guess, Joe. And a guess wouldn't do you any good."

By the deliberate blankness of Tony's face Joe knew there'd be no more information dispensed even if Tony had it.

There were men in the department trained for this sort of work and they were working on this case. He was no detective; he'd thought because he knew the principals in the case he might have an advantage over the Homicide men. But he was on the other side of the fence from the principals now that he was a cop. He couldn't expect any cooperation from the old gang.

He should go home and go to bed, a cocky boyish voice kept saying, "Let's go, let's go, Joe!" over and over in his head.

He drove down 40th, cut over to the avenue and down to 46th. On 46th, three numbers from the corner, was the *Domino*. It was a three story building, narrow and old-fashioned. The first floor held a dimly lighted bar and a row of booths along one wall.

Joe nodded to the bartender who pressed a buzzer that opened a gate separating the bar from the rear of the floor. Joe went through the gate. There was a self-service elevator but it was old and slow so Joe walked up to the second floor.

There were two tickers going and the pair of men at the blackboard covering all the race tracks were the same pair who'd always been there. Art Needles still sat behind the three-sided counter, his back to the wall, writing out the tickets.

There were a couple of dozen horse-players in the room, sharing the despondent shabbiness of the breed. All their lives they wait for the killing. Percentages mean nothing to them, Joe thought.

Art said, "Long time no see, Joe. What's on your mind?"

"Game upstairs?"

Art was casual. "Why?"

"Thought I'd drop a couple of dollars."

"On the cops now, aren't you?"

Joe nodded.

"Can't figure it," Art went on. "A smart operator like you."

"I can't, myself," Joe said, grinning. "But I had saved a pretty

good pile and I wanted to be a solid citizen. Didn't you ever get the feeling, Art, that you were in the wrong business?"

"Once in a while," Art admitted. "But that bartender downstairs made a mistake, letting you come up here."

"This is as far as I go, Art?"

"I didn't say that." Art spoke carefully. "I'm not forgetting the loans you made me when I was in trouble, Joe. But I want to know it—and straight. Are you going upstairs as a cop, or a poker player?"

"I'm going up as a friend of Les Gargan's," Joe said, "and as a friend of that kid who was killed. If the chief knew I was here, I'd get fired."

Art looked at him for seconds before saying, "Okay, Joe. You know where the door is. Good luck."

Joe knew where the door was and he heard it buzz as he approached it. It was to the left of the gent's washroom door and the catch was controlled from Art's corner of the room.

He went up another flight of steps and into a single, large room on the floor above. There were five tables of poker in here, four of them with house dealers and limited. The fifth table had no house dealer, no limit, and was rented by the evening to any party of free wheelers who applied and were considered eligible.

The same old gang was there. The furrier, Nick Klatt, and the publisher, Allan Gillespie; Leo Boone, the fight promoter and Jud Kelland, who did nothing besides gamble that Joe knew of. The other two Joe knew only slightly but they all gave him the big hello.

"Hear you're an honest man, now," Leo Boone joked. "Here to pinch the game, Joe?" He was a big man, about fifty and strikingly handsome. He had three loves in life, the fight game, poker, and his daughter, a beautiful girl of twenty. He also had a fatal weakness for a poker player—he never wanted to go home wondering.

"I'm here for revenge," Joe said. "Last time I tangled with you pirates I bled."

"It's too long ago for me to remember," Klatt said. "But there's always room for one more fish."

Joe sat down. A waiter came and he ordered a Scotch and water. Leo Boone was banking.

Joe wrote out a check for two thousand and Boone passed him his chips. As he did so he asked, "Anything you can tell us about Les Gargan, Joe?"

"Nothing official," Joe said. "I'm just a guy walking a beat. You fellows could probably tell me more than I know."

"A man named Trescott, from Homicide, came to see me about it today," Boone said. "Seems to think I'd have some reason—" He broke off, picked up his cards.

None of the others pressed Boone for more details, but Joe said, "Reason to kill him, Leo?"

Boone looked steadily at Joe. "That's right. He was making a play—I mean, he was seeing too much of Helen."

Helen was his daughter. Joe knew now why the others hadn't pressed him for details. He said no more about it.

He played a close game that night, varying little more than a hundred each way, and went home early, before the game broke up.

He's learned only that Les had been making a play for Helen Boone, something the department knew or they wouldn't have called on Leo. He'd spent above five hours and learned nothing. He'd spent five hours and caused some old friends annoyance.

But he wasn't going to quit, he told himself.

His precinct captain had other ideas about that. He called Joe into his office next morning. "Got a call from headquarters last night Joe. You nosing in on this Gargan case?"

"I saw some of the people involved," Joe admitted.

"Well, they put in a complaint and Homicide is burning. What got into you?"

"I knew Gargan pretty well," Joe said, "and I saw that car hit Tommy Hart. I thought I could do some good."

"Homicide's sensitive," Captain Nard said. "I'm not going to discipline you for this because your intentions were good. But from now on stick to your beat."

Joe thought of several things to say, and said none of them. What he said finally was, "Yes, sir." Then he left, feeling properly humiliated, and went over to the school to handle the morning traffic.

As he worked he thought of all the people he'd seen last night. Then he thought of Tommy Hart and knew he couldn't give up the hunt, futile though it had been so far.

The children were quiet this morning; they'd been orderly and subdued since the accident. He got them across the street and waved the traffic on. One of the cars in the row that passed was an Olds convertible, and it pulled over to the curb after passing the intersection.

June Gargan was behind the wheel. She kept the motor running.

"You look fine in your uniform, Joe," she called.

He said, "Thanks." He walked over and stood beside the car.

"You're not angry with me, Joe?"

"Why should I be?"

"Oh, I was sort of snippy last night." She smiled. "Drop in tonight, Joe. I want to talk to you."

He looked at her steadily. "About Les?"

She nodded. Then the Olds moved on.

Just before noon he saw the latest edition of the *Courier* in Wrede's drugstore. There was nothing new on the murder though the paper hinted that many leads were being investigated and the police were optimistic.

In the afternoon a department car cruised by and he saw it turn up Adams, going toward the Gargan house.

All afternoon Joe kept trying for one elusive bit of knowledge that might give him a clue. But nothing came to him. He was leaving the precinct station, going home, when he was accosted from a car for the second time that day.

Helen Boone sat behind the wheel. Joe didn't know if it was her youth or her beauty which was so appealing. She had black hair, dark eyes and a thin, well-modeled face.

She opened the car door. "Want a ride, Joe?"

"If you're going my way."

"I'm going your way. I came back to pick you up."

Joe got in and the car moved out into the traffic. "They think it's Dad, don't they?" she said.

"I don't know what they think," Joe said.

"One thing Dad didn't tell them, Joe, is that he lost a lot of money to Les about a week ago. He was trying to—break him, I think."

"Because of you?" Joe asked.

"I suppose so. Les wanted to marry me, Joe. He was going to divorce June if I'd marry him." A pause. "That's something else the police *don't* know."

"I'm one of the police," Joe reminded her.

"To me," she said, "you're a friend."

Joe thought about it for a minute. "Don't you think the police should know these things?"

"They won't unless you tell them. I'll never tell them."

"How much did your dad lose?"

"Nearly eighty thousand dollars. He paid off the next day—*in cash.*"

Eighty thousand in cash or any other way was a lot of money to lose in a poker game, even among players of the Boone and Gargan level. For that kind of money a lot of men would commit murder.

But not, Joe was sure a man like Leo Boone. Though, for his daughter . . .

Joe said, "I'll bet Les never declared that money, and didn't intend to, in his income tax. I wonder where it is, now?"

Helen shrugged. "He wasn't going to tell June about it. He wanted it for—for us. In case I decided—" She stopped.

"To marry him?"

She nodded. "He was very insistent, Joe. But I wasn't sure I loved him; I don't believe I did.

He was attentive, and—". Again she paused.

Joe said, "Les was a lot like your dad, though it isn't anything I'd say to your dad."

The car stopped in front of his apartment building. Joe looked at Helen. "Why did you tell me all this? What did you think *I* could do?"

"Nothing, I suppose. I wanted to tell somebody, and I've always thought a lot of you, Joe, admired you."

"Maybe," he said jestingly, "that's why you couldn't make up your mind about Les."

She flushed, then looked at him squarely. "Maybe it is. I hoped you could help me."

"I'm going to do what I can," he told her. "And against orders. But I don't know that I'll have any success. Don't worry about your dad, Helen. He can take care of himself and we know he's in the clear, don't we?"

"I should know it," she said. "But he—he hated Les so."

Leeds got out of the car, turned to face her. "Chin up, kid. Something will crack, soon. And your dad will be all right."

But he wasn't as convinced as he tried to sound. Eighty thousand dollars was a lot of money . . .

He ate in the apartment, that evening, a well-balanced blend of fried eggs and corn flakes. He read the evening paper, which revealed nothing new on the double killing. Then he went over to the garage on Hanover, before going to see June.

The same youth was inside, but Joe didn't go in. He sat in his car and studied the front of the garage. Then his glance wandered to the big apartment building next door, and, suddenly something clicked in his memory.

It had been some time ago, when June and Les were first married, but he remembered it clearly. The apartment in this building had been June's; she and Les shared it for only a short while before moving to Adams.

He drove out to the Gargan home, thinking about those early days of Les and June's marriage, trying to recall anything that might fit into the picture now.

June opened the door before he had a chance to ring the bell. She was wearing a chiffon negligee, and it didn't do her figure any harm. For some reason Joe felt suddenly uncomfortable. Something was wrong with the picture . . .

They went into the living room and she poured Joe's Scotch and water without asking what he'd have. She sat on the davenport beside him as she handed him the drink.

"I've been thinking about Les," she said. "Les and Helen Boone." She looked down at her drink. "And Leo Boone."

Joe ignored that, asked, "Did

you put in a complaint about me last night, to the Homicide department?"

Her surprise was honest. "Me? Of course not. What ever gave you that idea?"

"Some one did. But go on—about the Boones."

"I think Les wanted to marry Helen. And I heard rumors that Leo Boone was out to get Les."

"He was," Joe said. "He was out to break him, take all his money. That's why Les won all that money from him. Leo had the wrong attitude for a poker game."

"Money?" June said, but her surprise was forced now, as phony as both her eyebrows. Joe knew it immediately.

"Have you got it, June?" he said.

Her face hardened. Joe wondered how often Les had seen that expression. He said. "The eighty thousand, June. Have you got it?"

The drink was trembling in her hand. She set the glass on the table. "Who's been telling you ridiculous stories?"

Joe said, "I just remembered tonight that you and Les used to live on Hanover, right next to that garage where the plates were stolen. I was only there once. You didn't live there long. It was your place, wasn't it, that apartment? It was yours before you were married to Les."

She nodded stiffly. "So—?"

"Who was paying the rent?" Joe asked softly. "My guess would be Tony Valentine. You certainly couldn't have paid it out of your salary. Tony was featuring you about then, and Tony didn't give you star billing because of your singing talent. You're a lousy singer, June."

She was facing him squarely, now, and her face was very hard. But she didn't say anything.

"Tony probably parked his car in that garage. Maybe he still does. Maybe Tony took those plates—or did he pay one of the employees to steal them for him?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said harshly.

Joe said, "I'm just trying to put a case together, June. Les wanted a divorce. Maybe he'd found out you still see Tony. You might not get alimony in that case. As his widow, though, you'd get everything—*including eighty thousand of taxfree money.*"

"I was out of town when Les was killed," she said.

"Sure. So you'd be in the clear. But Tony had your key, didn't he? Tony killed Les. Has Tony got the eighty grand?"

"You can ask him," she said, her face rigid. "Or you can take your story to your *superiors.*" Her laugh was bitter. "Flatfoot!"

Joe rose. "I intend to," he said. "And something else. I've finally placed the guy I saw in the

back seat of the Cadillac that hit the kid. It was Tony Valentine. He was fleeing the scene of the crime—your house, where he'd just killed Les."

She leaped to her feet. "You're lying!" she screamed.

He was but she couldn't be sure of it. He said, "That's what I'm going to tell the Chief. Tonight." He headed toward the door.

"Wait," she said.

He turned back to see her standing rigidly in the center of the living room. And from the dimness of the dining room behind her he saw a shadow move.

He hadn't brought his badge, tonight, but he'd brought his gun. He hit the floor as he dug for it. But there was no shot from the dining room. Tony Valentine walked out of the shadows, a gun in his hand. He stopped about twelve feet away, stood looking down at Joe.

Joe was on one knee, now, his gun levelled at Tony.

Tony said, "What's your angle, kid? For your kind of wages you wouldn't be sticking your neck out this far. You want in?"

Joe shook his head. "It's something you wouldn't understand, Tony. Drop your gun and come along with me."

Tony's laugh was short and cynical. "This is a single shot gun, Joe, with a silencer. A single shot is all I need. I never miss.

"That wasn't the kind of gun that killed Les," Joe said. His eyes never left the pistol that was directed in a line with his eyes.

"No," Tony said, "it wasn't. That was—"

Joe stopped listening. He had seen the trigger finger tighten, and he dropped prone and his police Positive began to bark.

He saw Tony begin to crumple and heard the noise at the door before the lights went out and the sparks cascaded through his brain.

The man who sat beside the davenport on which he lay Joe recognized as Lieutenant Trescott from Homicide. The lieutenant smiled as Joe gingerly touched the bandage on his head.

"We got here just in time, Leeds. That tigress was about to crown you with some pottery. I thought you were told to lay off this case?"

Joe said nothing.

"Got a guy down at headquarters," the lieutenant went on, "who used to work in that garage. He answers the description you gave us. If you can identify him we'll clean up the rest of it." He coughed. "With your help, of course. Think you're able to navigate now?"

Joe nodded. "What are we waiting for. Let's go. If he's the driver, I'll know him." As he rose carefully to his feet the sound of a shrill, boyish voice came to him: "Let's go! Let's go, Joe!"

the hammerpond park burglary

by . . . H. G. Wells

Watkins was no ordinary burglar. He practiced art, and dreamed of being buried in the Abbey. He might have accomplished it, too!

It is a moot point whether burglary is to be considered as a sport, a trade, or an art. For a trade, the technique is scarcely rigid enough, and its claims to be considered an art are vitiated by the mercenary element that qualifies its triumphs. On the whole it seems to be most justly ranked as a sport, a sport for which no rules are at present formulated, and of which the prizes are distributed in an extremely informal manner. It was this informality of burglary that led to the regrettable extinction of two promising beginners at Hammerpond Park.

The stakes offered in this affair consisted chiefly of diamonds and other personal bric-a-brac belonging to the newly married Lady Aveling. Lady Aveling was the only daughter of Mrs. Montague Pangs—the well-known hostess. Her marriage to Lord Aveling was extensively advertised in the papers, the quantity and quality of her wedding presents, and the fact that the honeymoon was to be spent at Hammerpond.

The announcement of these valuable prizes created a consid-

We were tempted to say that H. G. Wells needs no introduction to our readers. But when a master of English prose is presented at court it is customary for the heralds to shout out his name, and blow on silver trumpets. This we do, right cheerfully, and usher him into your presence.

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erable sensation in the small circle in which Mr. Teddy Watkins was the undisputed leader, and it was decided that, accompanied by a duly qualified assistant, he should visit the village of Hammerpond in his professional capacity.

Being a man of naturally retiring and modest disposition, Mr. Watkins determined to make this visit incognito, and after due consideration of the conditions of his enterprise, he selected the role of a landscape artist and the unassuming surname of Smith.

He preceded his assistant, who, it was decided, should join him only on the last afternoon of his stay at Hammerpond.

Now the village of Hammerpond is perhaps one of the prettiest little corners in Sussex; many thatched houses still survive. The flint-built church with its tall spire nestling under the down is one of the finest and least restored in the county, and the beech-woods and bracken jungles through which the road runs to the great house are singularly rich in what the vulgar artist and photographer call "bits."

So that Mr. Watkins, on his arrival with two virgin canvasses, a brand-new easel, a paint-box, portmanteau, an ingenious little ladder made in sections, crowbar and wire coils, found himself welcomed with effusion and some curiosity by half-a-dozen other brethren of the brush.

It rendered the disguise he had chosen unexpectedly plausible, but it inflicted upon him a considerable amount of aesthetic conversation for which he was very imperfectly prepared.

"Have you exhibited very much?" said young Porson in the bar-parlour of the *Coach and Horses*, where Mr. Watkins was Skilfully accumulating local information on the night of his arrival.

"Very little," said Mr. Watkins. "Just a snack here and there."

"Academy?"

"Of course. *And* at the Crystal Palace."

"Did they hang you well?" said Porson.

"Don't talk rot," said Mr. Watkins, "I don't like it."

"I mean did they put you in a good place?"

"Whatderyer mean?" said Mr. Watkins suspiciously. "One 'ud think you were trying to make out I'd been put away."

Porson had been brought up by aunts, and was a gentlemanly young man even for an artist. He did not know what being "put away" meant, but he thought it best to explain that he intended nothing of the sort. As the question of hanging seemed a sore point with Mr. Watkins, he tried to divert the conversation a little.

"Do you do figure-work at all?"

"No, never had a head for figures," said Mr. Watkins, "My

miss—Mrs. Smith, I mean, does all that."

"She paints too!" said Porson. "That's rather jolly."

"Very," said Mr. Watkins, though he really did not think so, and, feeling the conversation was drifting a little beyond his grasp, added, "I came down here to paint Hammerpond House by moonlight."

"Really!" said Porson. "That's rather a novel idea."

"Yes," said Mr. Watkins, "I thought it rather a good notion when it occurred to me. I expect to begin tomorrow night."

"What! You don't mean to paint in the open, by night."

"I do, though."

"But how will you see your canvas?"

"Have the bloomin' cop's—" began Mr. Watkins, rising too quickly to the question, and then realizing this, bawled to Miss Durgan for another glass of beer. "I'm goin' to have a thing called a dark lantern," he said to Porson.

"But it's about new moon now," objected Porson. "There won't be any moon."

"There'll be the house," said Watkins. "At any rate I'm goin', you see, to paint the house first and the moon afterwards."

"Oh!" said Porson, too staggered to continue the conversation.

"They do say," said old Durgan, the landlord, who had maintained a respectful silence during the technical conversation, "as there's no less than three p'licemen from Azleworth on dewty every night in the house—'count of this Lady Aveling 'n her jewelery. One'm won fower-and-six last night, off second footman —tossin'."

Towards sunset next day, Mr. Watkins, virgin canvas, easel and a very considerable case of other appliances in hand, strolled up the pleasant pathway through the beech-woods to Hammerpond Park, and pitched his apparatus in a strategic position commanding the house.

Here he was observed by Mr. Raphael Sant, who was returning across the park from a study of the chalk-pits. His curiosity having been fired by Porson's account of the new arrival, he turned aside with the idea of discussing nocturnal art.

Mr. Watkins was apparently unaware of his approach. A friendly conversation with Lady Hammerpond's butler had just terminated, and that individual, surrounded by the three pet dogs which it was his duty to take for an airing after dinner had been served, was receding in the distance.

Mr. Watkins was mixing colour with an air of great industry. Sant approaching more nearly, was surprised to see the colour in question was as harsh and brilliant an emerald green as it is possible

to imagine. Having cultivated an extreme sensibility to colour from his earliest years, he drew the air in sharply between his teeth at the very first glimpse of this brew.

Mr. Watkins turned round. He looked annoyed.

"What on earth are you going to do with that *beastly* green?" said Sant.

Mr. Watkins realized that his zeal to appear busy in the eyes of the butler had evidently betrayed him into some technical error. He looked at Sant and hesitated.

"Pardon my rudeness," said Sant; "but really, that green is altogether too amazing. It came as a shock. What *do* you mean to do with it?"

Mr. Watkins was collecting his resources. Nothing could save the situation but decision.

"If you come here interrupting my work," he said, "I'm a-goin' to paint your face with it."

Sant retired, for he was a humorist and a peaceful man. Going down the hill he met Porson and Wainwright.

"Either that man is a genius, or he is a dangerous lunatic," said Sant. "Just go up and look at his green."

He continued his way, his countenance brightened by a pleasant anticipation of a cheerful affray round an easel in the gloaming, and the shedding of much green paint.

But to Porson and Wainwright, Mr. Watkins was less aggressive, and explained that the green was intended to be the first coating of his picture. It was, he admitted in response to a remark, an absolutely new method, invented by himself.

But subsequently he became more reticent; he explained he was not going to tell every passer-by the secret of his own particular style, and added some scathing remarks upon the meanness of people "hanging around" to pick up such tricks of the masters as they could, which immediately relieved him of their company.

Twilight deepened, first one, then another star appeared. The rooks amid the tall trees to the left of the house had long since lapsed into slumbrous silence, the house itself lost all the details of its architecture and became a dark grey outline, and then the windows of the salon shone out brilliantly, the conservatory was lighted up, and here and there a bedroom window burnt yellow.

Had anyone approached the easel in the park it would have been found deserted. One brief uncivil word in brilliant green sullied the purity of its canvas. Mr. Watkins was busy in the shrubbery with his assistant, who had discreetly joined him from the carriage-drive.

Mr. Watkins was inclined to be self-congratulatory upon the ingenious device by which he had carried all his apparatus boldly,

and in the sight of all men, right up to the scene of operation.

"That's the dressing-room," he said to his assistant, "and as soon as the maid takes the candle away and goes down to supper, we'll call in. My! how nice the house do look, to be sure, against the starlight, and with all its windows and lights! Swopme, Jim, I almost wish I *was* a painter-chap. Have you fixed that there wire across the path from the laundry?"

He cautiously approached the house until he stood below the dressing-room window, and began to put together his folding ladder. He was much too experienced a practitioner to feel any unusual excitement. Jim was reconnoitering the smoking-room. Suddenly, close beside Mr. Watkins in the bushes, there was a violent crash and a stifled curse. Someone had stumbled over the wire which his assistant had just arranged. He heard feet running on the gravel pathway beyond.

Mr. Watkins, like all true artists, was a singularly shy man, and he incontinently dropped his folding ladder and began running circumspectly through the shrubbery. He was indistinctly aware of two people hot upon his heels and he fancied that he distinguished the outline of his assistant in front of him.

In another moment he had vaulted the low stone wall bounding the shrubbery, and was in the open park. Two thuds on the turf followed his own leap.

It was a close chase in the darkness through the trees. Mr. Watkins was a loosely-built man in good training, and he gained hand-over-hand upon the hoarsely panting figure in front. Neither spoke, but, as Mr. Watkins pulled up alongside, a qualm of awful doubt came over him. The other man turned his head at the same moment and gave an exclamation of surprise.

"It's not Jim," thought Mr. Watkins, and simultaneously, the stranger flung himself, as it were, at Watkins' knees, and they were forthwith grappling on the ground together.

"Lend a hand, Bill," cried the stranger as the third man came up.

And Bill did—two hands in fact and some accentuated feet. The fourth man, presumably Jim, had apparently turned aside and made off in a different direction. At any rate he did not join the trio.

Mr. Watkins' memory of the incidents of the next two minutes is extremely vague. He has a dim recollection of having his thumb in the corner of the mouth of the first man, and feeling anxious about its safety, and for some seconds at least he held the head of the gentleman answering to the name of Bill, to the ground by the hair.

He was also kicked in a

great number of different places, apparently by a vast multitude of people. Then the gentleman who was not Bill, got his knee below Mr. Watkins' diaphragm, and tried to curl him up upon it.

When his sensations became less entangled he was sitting upon the turf, and eight or ten men—the night was dark, and he was rather too confused to count—were standing round him, apparently waiting for him to recover.

He mournfully assumed that he was captured and would probably have made some philosophical reflections on the fickleness of fortune, had not his internal sensations disinclined him for speech.

He noticed very quickly that his wrists were not handcuffed, and then a flask of brandy was put in his hand. This touched him a little—it was such unexpected kindness.

"He's a-comin', round," said a voice which he fancied belonging to the Hammerpond second footman.

"We've got 'em, sir, both of 'em," said the Hammerpond butler, the man who had handed him the flask. "Thanks to *you*."

No one answered this remark. Yet he failed to see how it applied to him.

"He's fair dazed," said a strange voice, "the villains half-murdered him."

Mr. Teddy Watkins decided to remain fair dazed until he had a better grasp of the situation. He perceived that two of the black figures round him stood side-by-side with a dejected air, and there was something in the carriage of their shoulders that suggested to his experienced eye that they were bound together. Two! In a flash, he rose to his position. He emptied the little flask and staggered—obsequious hands assisting him—to his feet. There was a sympathetic murmur.

"Shake hands, sir, shake hands," said one of the figures near him. "Permit me to introduce myself. I am very greatly indebted to you. It was the jewels of my wife, Lady Aveling which attracted these scoundrels to the house."

"Very glad to make your lordship's acquaintance," said Teddy Watkins.

"I presume you saw the rascals making for the shrubbery, and dropped down on them?"

"That's exactly how it happened," said Mr. Watkins.

"You should have waited till they got in at the window," said Lord Aveling. "They would get it hotter if they had actually committed the burglary. And it was lucky for you two that the policemen were out by the gates, and followed up the three of you. I doubt if you could have secured the two of them—though it was confoundedly plucky of you all the same."

"Yes, I ought to have thought

of all that," said Mr. Watkins, "but one can't think of everything."

"Certainly not," said Lord Aveling, "I am afraid they have mauled you a little," he added. The party was now shoving towards the house. "You walk rather lame. May I offer you my arm?"

And instead of entering Hammerpond House by the dressing-room window, Mr. Watkins entered it—slightly intoxicated, and inclined now to cheerfulness again—on the arm of a real live peer, and by the front door.

"This," thought Mr. Watkins, "is burgling in style!"

The *scoundrels,* seen by the gaslight, proved to be mere local amateurs unknown to Mr. Watkins and they were taken down into the pantry and there watched over by the three policemen, two game-keepers with loaded guns, the butler, an ostler, and a carman, until the dawn allowed of their removel to Hazelhurst police-station.

Mr. Watkins was made much of in the salon. They devoted a sofa to him, and would not hear of a return to the village that night. Lady Aveling was sure he was brilliantly original, and said her idea of Turner was just such another rough, half-inebriated, deep-eyed, brave, and clever man.

Someone brought up a remarkable little folding-ladder that had been picked up in the shrubbery, and showed him how it was put together. They also described how wires had been found in the shrubbery, evidently placed there to trip up unwary pursuers. It was lucky he had escaped these snares.

And they showed him the jewels.

Mr. Watkins had the sense not to talk too much, and in any conversational difficulty, fell back on his internal pains. At last he was seized with stiffness in the back, and yawning. Everyone suddenly awoke to the fact that it was a shame to keep him talking after his affray, so he retired early to his room, the little red room next to Lord Aveling's suite. . . .

The dawn found a deserted easel bearing a canvas with a green inscription in the Hammerpond Park, and it found Hammerpond House in commotion. But if the dawn found Mr. Teddy Watkins and the Aveling diamonds, it did not communicate the information to the police.

Leslie Charteris' rollicking buccaneer, Simon Templar, resumes his fantastic ***career in the Caribbean.*** *This time he locks his halo with the horns of Mark Cuffee, sent by the wicked men of the Kremlin to Jamaica. Watch for his greatest adventure,* THE MAN FROM MOSCOW, *in the next issue.*

picture of a crime

by Robert & Christine Harris

Graham Gordon was a painter with a photographic eye for reality. The trouble was, he was too perfect and his oils spelled murder.

THE EXHIBITION of the Quebec Institute of Arts and Crafts was in its third week before Luke Maitland judged that attendance had fallen off enough to allow a quiet inspection. The Saturday he chose was a bright October day with dark clouds, so that the asphalt of Sherbrooke Street seemed unusually black and shiny in contrast with the bright sky and flaming leaves. Above the buildings, Mount Royal looked like a crimson backdrop designed by a scenic genius.

Maitland parked his ancient coupé on a side street and strode up the broad steps of the Art Gallery two at a time. He was contemplating a large and low-keyed abstraction on scientific themes when a hand touched him on the shoulder. He turned to face a tall slender man, prematurely grey-haired and smiling. Dr. James Brace always reminded Maitland of Ronald Colman at his English best—his women patients spoke of him as "distinguished." Maitland liked him.

"Seen much of the exhibition, Maitland?" Brace asked in his beautifully modulated tones. "I can't say I have a great deal of

Perhaps more than other mortals, confirmed mystery-story addicts are apt to claim that there is nothing new under the sun. Well, here's a tale that is new in just about every respect—new authors, a new background, and a new approach to the discovery of a crime. We hope it gives you a new reaction.

eye for all this"—he gestured around the room—"but I enjoy it. I simply haven't the time to keep abreast of it."

"Doctors are a busy lot," Maitland agreed. "What's this—one hundred six? Shapes Dissolving in Four-Dimensional space—it looks it."

"Pleases the eye," Dr. Brace said, "but I like things a little more—I believe 'representational' is the word."

"Whisper it here," Maitland advised him, "or you'll go out on your ear."

"How's crime these days?" Brace asked suddenly. "Have you heard if the police are making any progress with these holdups in the suburbs? It's high time they were stopped. When I take a late call outside the bright lights now I carry a gun in the car—especially if I have narcotics with me." He turned back to the paintings. "Here's something that suits me better. Pretty girl, of course, but good picture besides. But . . ." He hesitated and fell to studying the painting closely.

Maitland referred to his catalogue, found the work in question to be titled enlighteningly, *Girl with Red Flower,* by Graham Gordon. It was a large picture—a carefully-done nude study of an extremely blond girl sitting by an open window. In a mirror beside her were visible the reflected details of an artist's studio and the window opened upon a vista first of city roofs and, further away, of open country. The flower of the title was an enormous geranium in a pot on the sill, so placed and treated that it gave focus and meaning to the whole composition. An eye-pleasing picture, Brace would have remarked—but Maitland was conscious of something about it which he did not in the least like.

"Do you know this artist's work?" Dr. Brace asked, an odd intentness in his voice.

"I knew it was a Gordon when I looked at it. It's in his usual style. I know the man slightly."

"You know everyone, don't you? Is he an impressionist?"

Maitland laughed. "On the contrary. Gordon is almost photographic. Some call him a mere illustrator. That's another fighting word among artists. He has a passion for detail but whether it's conscious or not I couldn't say. Look at that mirror and the petals of the flower."

"What about his color?"

"He has a remarkable eye for it. He's an amazing observer of what he sees. In fact, he'd have made a fine detective. I'll show you some of his stuff later and see if you don't agree."

Brace straightened up. "Then there's something odd about this painting—that girl was sick when he painted it."

"Can you suggest with what?"

Brace hesitated. "This may sound melodramatic, I know—

but I should say she was being slowly poisoned. Observe the unhealthy color of the skin."

Maitland nodded. "That was what was bothering me—but I couldn't place it till you pointed it out. What do you think it might be?"

"That's a difficult question. It could be arsenic. The lips are somewhat blue—and look at the fingernails. Quite a definite greenish tint there. And the eyes are dull." The doctor looked squarely at Maitland. "I think this should at least be investigated. Do you know the model or when the picture was painted?"

"I can find out something about it," Maitland said. "There's Bartley Rourke over there now—he was on the hanging jury."

"The *what?*"

"The hanging jury. The group that selects the pictures and arranges the hanging of them."

"Oh—it sounds a trifle ominous. Go and talk to him by all means. I'll meet you under that big statue in half an hour."

Luke found Bartley Rourke raptly regarding one of his own entries. This was usual, for he was well known to despise all other artists except Modigliani. When Maitland came up to him, he said at once, "Look at that now—the bony structure of the face. Only Modigliani or I could have done it."

"It is beautiful," Maitland agreed. "But I want to talk to you about a picture of Graham Gordon's."

"The figure thing? A sentimental daub—christmas-card stuff! He used the little Nilssen for it, I know."

"Do you know where she is now?" Luke asked.

"Hjordis Nilssen? I do not. I know her very slightly though her services are much in demand. Old Charbonnier would never paint from anyone else."

"When was this picture painted, do you know?"

Bartley Rourke considered for a moment. "It wasn't rushed in at the last moment with the paint still wet on it the way some of them are. I'd say he finished it about six weeks ago. I opposed its inclusion by the way—it's terrible."

Maitland met Dr. Brace at the appointed time. By then he had had a chance to reflect on the subject and was worried. "I think you're right," he said. "I think there's been enough time lost already. Would you care to come round to Gordon's place right now? I've been there before and know where it is."

Brace was agreeable and they went out together. As they passed through the door Maitland hung back for a moment to look at another picture. "There's the same girl," he said "and this one is really a sentimental daub. It must have jarred Bartley Rourke's

aesthetic sensibilities." A thought struck him, and he bent to look more closely. "Unsigned. The brushwork's vaguely familiar but I can't quite place it."

"Don't suppose it matters," Brace suggested. "She was probably a professional model." He led the way out of the building and down the steps.

As they walked along toward Maitland's car, Luke stopped suddenly, stooped, and came up with a shiny quarter. "Good luck for me," he said. "I found some money."

"Let's hope it's a good sign," Brace answered, as they came to the car.

Graham Gordon's studio was out beyond Mount Royal on the edge of Hampstead. The view from its north window recalled the background they had seen in the picture an hour before. Gordon was at home and just finishing work. He and the girl who had been modeling for him, still stiff from holding the pose, were sitting on opposite sides of a table, drinking coffee.

"Sit down," Gordon told them. An enormous man with a black square-cut beard he was in shirtsleeves and his suspenders gave him a somewhat farmerish look. A brush, forgotten behind his ear, dripped paint now and then. "Luke, we haven't seen you in some time. And your friend . . .?" Maitland introduced Dr. Brace. "Glad to have you, Doctor. This is Edna Cartwright. We were having coffee after finishing up for the day. Join us?"

Maitland and Dr. Brace accepted and sat down. "Luke," Gordon said, "you get yours in a glass. I threw some cups at Edna yesterday and haven't got any more in yet. Put your spoon in while I pour or the glass'll break. I guess I keep the place a bit draughty, Doctor—gesundheit!" This as Brace suddenly sneezed violently.

"I'll say he does," the model agreed.

"It costs money to heat these barns," Gordon said.

"Mr. Gordon," Maitland said, getting down to business. "You painted a girl here not so long ago —Hjordis Nilssen. You have the picture in the Exhibition, right?"

"Yes," Gordon answered slowly. "Yes, I did, poor girl."

"That was terrible, Hjordis going like that," Edna Cartwright put in. "I can't say I liked her very much, especially after the way she treated poor Bartley, but all the same . . ."

"She's dead then?" Maitland asked.

"A month ago. She'd been having some trouble with her stomach for a long time," Edna Cartwright said. "It seemed to go on and on and this night she went to bed, feeling not too good but not serious. In the night she was taken really bad with awful pains

and our landlady called the doctor but he couldn't do anything. He called it some long name, I can't remember it now, but it means real bad indigestion."

"Gastro enteritis?" Maitland suggested.

"Something like that."

Maitland and Brace exchanged a glance. "You stayed in the same place?" Luke asked.

"Oh, yes. Mrs. Lane got me out of bed to help her in the night. It was awful."

"You didn't actually see her die?"

"Good heavens, *no,* Mr. Maitland! I couldn't stand that. The doctor sent me and Mrs. Lane out of the room when he saw she was—what was going to happen."

There was a pause. Dr. Brace broke it, asking, "What was the name of the doctor Mrs. Lane called?"

"Dr. Sinclair. Hjordis knew him before. He's young, and has an office near the Western Hospital."

"I don't know him but I can get in touch with him," Brace said, standing. "Maitland, I think we'd better be getting along."

"Kick that paint tube under the table, Doctor," Gordon said. "I'll pick it up when I need it. Luke, what *is* this? Little Nilssen wasn't murdered, was she?"

Maitland looked at him soberly. "It's beginning to look as though she might have been."

There was some difficulty about arranging for an exhumation. Detective Inspector Mike Jukes was inclined to be skeptical at first but Maitland was persistent and the inspector finally gave way. The ceremony was held in the dead of night with a very nervous Doctor Sinclair and a police surgeon present. Inspector Jukes was in official charge.

Maitland was there, chiefly because no one realized he had no business coming at all. Hjordis Nilssen's family was represented by an elderly uncle-by-marriage.

Dr. Brace had planned to be there but at the last moment had to rush off to upper Westmount, where a patient of his had suddenly lapsed into a critical phase of some illness.

When the workmen in the little tool-shed reluctantly turned back the casket lid it became apparent that Hjordis Nilssen had been a pretty girl—surprisingly apparent, all things considered.

"I guess," Dr. Sinclair said hesitantly, "it was arsenic, all right. She's still—well, in good shape. But not good for me."

"Nonsense, man," Dr. Coulter, the police surgeon, said robustly. "Can't go round smelling murder all the time. No reason to suspect anything out of the way, I hope? Hell, you'll be all right."

"It's kind of you to say so," Sinclair said sincerely. Then, slowly, "Better get her out, eh?"

"To work, then. Here you—and you—give us a hand."

Coulter was so aggressively non-squeamish that Maitland suspected he had some inner squeamishness to conceal. Maitland caught the glint of stainless steel in the light of the trouble-lamps which had been rigged in the shed and took this as his signal to slip outside.

Maitland was filling and lighting his pipe upwind from the reek of formaldehyde in the shed when Mike Jukes spoke from behind him. "If you weren't so proud of that mop of red hair you'd wear a hat on a night like this." Then, more seriously, "You were really that sure, just from Brace's seeing the picture?"

"Some classes of people get murdered more frequently than others," Maitland answered evasively. "Wealthy men—women with no family ties—really beautiful girls . . ."

"You'd call Hjordis Nilssen a really beautiful girl?"

Maitland shrugged. "She made her living by her looks. By the way, that other picture of her—it just came to me. Bartley Rourke painted it. It's different from his usual style but the technique is there. Modigliani wouldn't have approved at all."

"No law against his painting her, was there?"

"No—but he lied about knowing her. Edna Cartwright mentioned him too—Hjordis threw him over or something of the sort. Besides, the painting was definitely a love-portrait, hence the radiant sentimentality. When I went back to the gallery today it was gone."

"Frightened?"

"Or just doesn't want to admit she got away from him. Bartley prides himself on his amorous technique."

"We'll have a few words with Mr. Rourke, A.R.C.A. Has it occurred to you that Dr. Sinclair's very nervous tonight?"

"Unprofessionally so, you think?"

"Perhaps. I know he's only a kid but after all he *is* a doctor. He must have cut people up before now. And he certainly had opportunity to poison her. When she was taken sick, you know, they didn't just pick him out of the directory at random. She'd consulted him at least once before. Oh, hello, Mr. Lund."

Hjordis Nilssen's uncle approached them, apparently after a brief stroll along the graveled road through the cemetery. "Are they likely to be much longer?" he asked fretfully. "This is very unpleasant for me, you know."

"Of course it is, sir," Mike said patiently, "but surely if Miss Nilssen was murdered . . ."

"I know. Of course the truth must out. Anna and I warned Hjordis again and again about the sort of life she led. Artists and that sort of thing."

"You kept in touch with her then?" Mike asked. "Care for a cigarette, Mr. Lund?"

"Thank you, I don't use tobacco. We tried to see a little of Hjordis. She was an—an attractive person to be with. A pleasant-mannered girl in spite of everything. Since she came out from Manitoba she would come to Sunday dinner perhaps once a month —I believe that families in the city should try to keep together. Anna is much upset."

"I'm sure she would be," Luke said. "Well, here they are now."

Sinclair and Coulter had appeared, the police doctor carefully carrying a couple of wrapped parcels. "She can go back now," Coulter said. "I'm taking these to Bruce MacPherson at the police lab right now. He's standing by, waiting for them."

There was a general move to break up and Maitland maneuvered Dr. Sinclair into driving back to the bright lights with himself and Mike Jukes. They said little until, on the fringe of the city, Maitland pulled up outside one of those large roadhouses which abound on the outskirts of Montreal.

"What about a quiet drink?" Maitland asked. "I think we could all use one."

When they were all settled in a large dim booth over scotch-and-waters Mike Jukes turned to Dr. Sinclair and asked bluntly, "Doctor, when Miss Nilssen consulted you three months ago, what was wrong with her?" Then, as Sinclair hesitated, "You can forget medical ethics right now. The girl's been murdered and I'm asking you as a policeman."

"She wanted to know if she was pregnant," the young doctor muttered hurriedly. "She wasn't if you must know."

"She mention anything about the man in the case?" Luke inquired.

Sinclair was oddly reluctant to talk but he answered their questions straight enough. Hjordis Nilssen had not been apprehensive or vindictive or anything in particular. She had wanted to know the truth about her condition and Sinclair had told her."

"You make any further effort to get in touch with her?" Mike asked.

Sinclair's answer was revealing. "No. Under the circumstances she might have thought I thought—"

"We get it," Mike broke in on what was beginning to be a thoroughly confused explanation. "Do you know anything else about her we haven't already covered?"

Dr. Sinclair hesitated. "It seems to me I saw her once before," he said slowly. "I thought so that day she came to my office. There was a crowd and she was with an older man—oh, it's all too vague. I'd only waste your time with it."

Jukes and Maitland dropped Dr. Sinclair at his office and drove downtown through the dwindling traffic to Provincial Police Headquarters. Coulter and Dr. MacPherson, the police analyst, were

in the laboratory at the back of the building. They had reduced one of the samples to a flask of brownish but clear liquid and the Marsh apparatus had been set up.

"Gutzeit's test is grreatly prreferrable," MacPherson explained to them, "and for ma ain satisfaction I'll run one as confirmation—but the law specifies Marrsh's method, so Marrsh's 'twull be. I'll trouble ye for that striker, Dr. Coulter."

MacPherson lit a Bunsen burner and shoved it under the flask, which he had connected to the apparatus. For a few minutes they watched the fine capillary tube in silence until the characteristic deposit of the metal began to plate out on the cooler part of the glass.

"Arrsenic—or possibly antimony, which is equally poisonous, of course," the chemist observed. "We maun deeferentiate, ye ken, but meanwhile there's na doot at a' but what the puir lassie was murrderred. A gey sma' amount, ye'll absairve, Dr. Coulter. Maist poisoners lace in the poison as though 'twere sugar in a cup o' tea. There canna ha been three grains in the hale system—but 'twas 'enough."

"Not so deep as a well nor so wide as a church door," Maitland murmured. "The murderer knows poisons."

"Aye he does," MacPherson agreed. "Dr. Coulter's gi'en me the facts of the case and it seems to me the actions of yon lad Sinclair might weel be luiked into. He was in love wi' the girrl, ye say, Maitland?"

Maitland nodded. "So were lots of others apparently." He looked at his watch. "One-thirty—I'm going to bed. I suppose you're set here for the night, Bruce? I'll see you some time tomorrow then."

Mike Jukes decided on a nap in his own office in Headquarters until morning—so Maitland was left to drive alone to his Queen Mary Road apartment. The streets were quiet, as was the darkened foyer of the building. But his telephone was ringing shrilly when he unlocked his door and he had the feeling that it had been ringing for a long time. Without turning on the lights but locking the door behind him, he crossed the room and took down the receiver.

"Hello?" Luke said.

"Mr. Maitland?" It was a girl's voice, quick and agitated. "This is Edna Cartwright. I met you at Graham Gordon's studio, remember? Mr. Maitland, I'm frightened. I've been trying to get you all evening but you were out."

"Want to tell me about it?"

The story poured out in an incoherent flood. Gordon's place was always littered with paint-tubes, brushes, rags and the paraphernalia of the artist's trade and when Edna Cartwright had been going home that afternoon she had stopped on her way out to

pick a few of them off the floor.

In a corner, where it seemed to have rolled, she had found a small cylindrical bottle, screw-capped, nearly full of a white powder. Somehow she had kept herself under control until she could get out of the studio with the bottle wrapped up in a scarf.

"Have you handled it with your bare fingers?"

"Yes, but just to look at it. Oh, you mean fingerprints. Oh, I'm afraid . . ."

"Well, it can't be helped. Don't worry about it. Is there a label on it?"

"No, just some writing in black crayon. Capital A, small S and a two, still smaller. Capital O, or zero maybe, and a little three." As for its appearance, she said, the powder was of small white bright-looking grains, apparently quite hard.

"Are you at your boarding-house now, Miss Cartwright? Right. I hope your landlady won't mind but I think I'd better come out there and pick it up right away. Can you manage it? Say in half an hour."

Maitland replaced the receiver and dialed another number. "Put me through to the lab, please," he told the police-sergeant who answered. "I know there's someone there." And in another moment, "Bruce? Luke Maitland here. I'll be back in an hour or so with another sample—think it may be the arsenic itself. That's what the label says. Can you be ready to run it when I get there? Thanks. Tell you more when I see you."

In another ten minutes he was streaking through the sleeping city, with his foot on the floorboards.

The first trace of light was showing in the East when Maitland emerged from Police Headquarters with Mike Jukes and Dr. Coulter. MacPherson was still busy with tests in his laboratory.

"We have only the girl's word for it," Mike said, "that she found the bottle where she says she did. After all, *she* saw a lot of Hjordis Nilssen."

"And it makes Gordon almost incredibly careless," Coulter added. "Her fingerprints were the only ones on the bottle."

"Of course," Maitland pointed out, "it would help your case to remark that Gordon's a hot-tempered and erratic man—but hardly that erratic. Besides, this isn't a hot-tempered person's crime."

"There's young Sinclair," Coulter said. "He felt the need of inventing an unknown suspect, the mysterious older man he saw with her under obscure circumstances."

"I'm not so sure he *did* invent him," Maitland said. "Hjordis Nilssen did have an admirer of distinguished appearance, somewhat older than herself. I had a long talk with Edna Cartwright before I came on here. Quite

cynically, I gather, Hjordis took him for a lot of money and passed on to Graham Gordon."

"Was it love with Graham Gordon too?" Mike asked.

"I doubt it. He painted her picture with photographic and unsentimental accuracy. But people always think that artists and models are having love-affairs. Actually most artists are pretty well engrossed with their work."

"Did Miss Cartwright say anything about that other painter—Rourke? He might have carried a grudge."

"She said that was over a long time ago. It still seems to irk him—he was mighty careful to keep it quiet. Bartley talks a nice streak of violence but he's actually a harmless soul. Hjordis must have flitted from flower to flower—quite rapidly too."

"She seems to have asked for trouble," Mike said.

"But she shouldn't have been slowly poisoned. Apparently she was going out with this chap or seeing him all the time she was cooling off on him—and he knew it and most likely she didn't realize he knew. I suppose he kept pestering her for just one more date—and every time he took her out he fed her a little more arsenic with her filet mignon."

"That's true," Dr. Coulter said. "The poison had worked all through her system—hair, nails and what have you. She'd been absorbing it for a couple of months at least, although in minimum doses."

"And who was this joker—have you any idea?" Mike asked. "And when did he work this frame on Graham Gordon? I suppose that's your idea of what happened."

"When I took him there," Maitland said. "He had a hole in his trousers pocket. He dropped a quarter on the street, in fact. I suppose he had the bottle wrapped up in a handkerchief in that pocket and when he pretended to sneeze and whipped out the handkerchief the bottle simply fell through the hole. I seem to remember something being said about something falling just as we stood up to leave."

"Not *Brace!*" Mike cried. "But a girl like that—how long have you suspected this?"

"From the outset. No diagnostician on earth could have stated quite so certainly what was wrong with her just from a picture. That she was sick quite possibly—that she was being poisoned, well maybe—that it was arsenic—tell it to Sweeney. Besides, he made sure that I saw the picture. Led me right up to it.

"Probably Sinclair saw them together at some medical get-together, maybe the big Medics' Ball at the University—Sinclair only graduated last year. How many big affairs do you suppose a quiet broke young doctor, who hasn't even a regular girl friend, goes to in a year?" He paused.

"Brace must have been besotted with her."

"Brace is a very conceited man," Dr. Coulter said. "He wouldn't put up with losing her."

"Conceited?" Mike countered. "He was perfectly safe but he had to try to get Gordon as well. He must be mad."

"He is," Maitland agreed. "Quite mad. Here he is now. I suppose he has to find out just what we're up to."

A big car had pulled up at the curb. As they walked down the steps to meet him Dr. Brace leaned out—it was an English model with a right-hand drive. His face was haggard and he needed a shave but his easy graceful attitude behind the wheel and the lines of his exquisitely-cut topcoat still gave him an air of distinction.

"Maitland," he said, looking up at them with a quick smile. "I just got through up in Westmount. Wondered how you were coming on, so I looked up young Sinclair in the Medical Directory and routed the poor boy out of bed. He told me you might be down here."

"Dr. Brace," Mike cut in, ignoring all this, "why didn't you tell us you were in love with Hjordis Nilssen? It would have saved us a lot of trouble."

Brace looked quickly from one man to the other, reading their faces.

"We know all about it, Dr. Brace," Maitland said gently.

"Of course," Brace said quietly. "That's what you think. But when you see this"—he leaned forward and calmly opened the glove compartment of the car—"you'll understand a lot more."

It was Mike who tumbled to the ruse first but Dr. Brace had won enough time. Before they could move to stop him he snatched a small automatic from the glove compartment and shot himself through the head.

Edgar Wallace was certainly the most prolific detective story writer in the British Isles for more years than there are toes on a troll. But the way his pen raced, marred neither the vigor nor the painstaking precision of his style. It's not too surprising when you remember that Mr. Wallace was once a special constable. A law officer has to take pains—as you will see when you read DISHONOR AMONG THIEVES, *in the very next* SAINT.

the man who was missing

by . . . Mignon G. Eberhart

She could remember Mariette as a child—tiny and lovely. It was hard to think of her now caught up in the big wheel of murder.

SUSAN DARE WAITED in the dusk. Above her into the night rose the dim, dark outline of Notre Dame. The heavy doors behind her slowly opened now and then, and closed, as an occasional figure went in or out of the church. Mariette, thought Susan, ought to come soon. Perhaps she herself was a little early at their meeting place, for she hadn't known exactly how to find the French quarter. She hadn't, in fact, known that there was a French quarter in all Chicago.

Yet she hadn't been surprised when Mariette Berne told her that, until times were better, she was living there. She would, of course, have sought her own people. Susan wondered if she would recognize the girl. It had been so long since Susan had been taken in frilly white dresses and huge hair-ribbons to Monsieur Berne's dancing school. Mariette Berne had been then a tiny, dark-eyed wisp of a child; dancing, said the elders approvingly, like a fairy.

And now years had passed, and Monsieur Berne's dancing school was no more, and tiny

Susan Dare returns once more, to these pages, with all of her delicacy, grace, and charm. When Mrs. Eberhart created Susan out of her own Chicago background the dazzling sunlight of a sophisticated cosmopolitanism danced and flickered all about her, laying bare to her probing scrutiny every fiendishly hidden cranny of the criminal mind.

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Mariette Berne had grown up and had become a ballet dancer and had telephoned to Susan out of that fragrant past.

If it hadn't been for that past, if the girl's voice hadn't been so soft and appealing, if she hadn't —— Come, now, Susan admonished Susan, admit the truth! It's not sentiment that's brought you here. And it's not because a probably fourth-rate artist has taken it into his head to disappear and that he was engaged to marry little Mariette Berne. It's because of the soap on the shaving brush.

A woman came swiftly from the dusk and approached the door of the church. She was tall and slender and, as there was a light above the door, Susan caught an instant's glimpse of a singularly regular face and carefully arranged dark hair. There was something about her—her hat, perhaps, or the sleek lines of her thin light gown—that was not what Susan would have expected to see just there.

But at the moment she was only concerned with the fact that the woman could not be Mariette Berne, for she did not hesitate at sight of Susan but went rather hurriedly into the church, and the door closed behind her.

It was terrifically hot. Susan shifted the thin white coat on her arm and was thankful she had worn the thinnest, coolest tailored white silk her wardrobe included.

She wished that Mariette would come. And just then she came, emerging from the twilight.

Susan recognized her at once. Her great, soft dark eyes had changed only to hold sorrow. Her hair made a dark cloud for her heart-shaped face, which with maturity had grown beautiful. Her hand met and clung to Susan's.

"Oh, Miss Dare—you will do it, then? You will find André?"

"I'll try," said Susan, wishing the girl's eyes were not so terribly beseeching. "I'll try. But I may not succeed."

"Oh, but you will," cried the girl with soft earnestness. "I know about you. I've read your books —you can solve *any* mystery."

"Look here, my dear," said Susan gently. "Are you sure that you want to know?"

"If—he's dead, you mean?" breathed the girl. Her hands clasped and unclasped, but there was suddenly a clear, firm strength about her mouth. "I must know," she said in a whisper. "Whatever it is—*I must know.*"

It wasn't what Susan had meant. A voluntary disappearance on the part of the artist had been in her mind.

"You see," added Mariette quite simply, "he would let me know—if he could. If he were alive he would let me know."

After a moment Susan leaned over toward the small dressing case she had brought. "You've told Madame Touseau that you

were bringing me?" she inquired.

"Yes," said Mariette. "There is a room next to mine. I told her you were a friend of mine. Out of a job." They walked down the steps and off into the mysterious dusk. "But Madame," said Mariette doubtfully, "is very keen."

"Let me see if I have things straight. Madame Touseau owns the house where you live?"

"Yes. There are several roomers. She calls us guests. We have meals there, too, and it is very good cooking. Everything is very clean, and doesn't cost much."

"How many people live there?"

"There's me. And André had a studio in the top floor—the attic. Then there are now, only Mr. Kinder, and Louis Malmin. The maid-of-all-work, sleeps out."

"Tell me again," said Susan, "just what happened."

"Well—first you must understand that Madame is very sharp. Nothing at all happens in the house that she does not discover one way or another. I mean, when she says the doors were bolted for the night *after* the guests were all inside the house, and that André did not go out again before the doors were bolted, then that is right. Of course, now, she says that she is not sure. But the doors were bolted on the inside the next morning. I know that."

"Windows?" suggested Susan.

"I don't think so," said Mariette. "His windows are very high with a straight drop to the street. And in these streets it is well to keep houses locked. That night—that was Wednesday night, two nights ago—André said good-night to me there in the corridor. I watched him walk up the stairs to his studio in the attic. At the door he turned and waved at me, as he always does. And—that was the last time he was seen. He closed the door and—vanished. Simply dropped out of sight."

They walked on for a few steps in silence. Around them, lining the narrow streets, were tall houses, their shabbiness and their smoke-stained walls hidden by the night.

When Susan spoke, her voice had lowered. "Madame did not want you to call the police?"

"She would not permit it," said the girl slowly. "Madame—is very determined. As you will see."

Madame's changing story bothered Susan. Still, perhaps the woman had honestly not heard André's departure, and then, when it became evident that he had gone, had been obliged to admit her mistake. Yet the door had been bolted on the inside: was that a mistake—or had he gone out some other way? After all, there were windows on the first floor.

"Madame," said Mariette softly, "would be in a rage if she know that I had told you. She says that André grew tired of me."

"I expect he could have got out

of the house some way if he had wanted to," said Susan.

"Perhaps," said Mariette, in a way that rejected it completely. "But there is the shaving brush, Miss Dare. A man does not put soap on a wet shaving brush and then make up his mind to disappear. And do so taking nothing at all with him. Not even his money."

"Money?"

"Not very much," said Mariette with a sigh. "It was hidden under a brick of the fireplace. I took it," she added with simplicity. "No need to let Madame find it. I will take care of it for him. There's only a little."

"Have you watched the papers?" asked Susan.

"Oh, yes. There's been nothing. No accident—no—" the girl choked and said—"no suicide. Nothing that I could think would be André."

Well, of course, a man would scarcely start to shave, be overcome with a desire to commit suicide in the middle of it, and dash away to hurl himself—where? In the river, perhaps.

And there was something strange about Mariette's bald little story that caught and held Susan. It might prove to be merely a voluntary disappearance of a man who was important only to himself and to Mariette.

"Had he any enemies?" she asked abruptly. "Did he ever seem to have sums of money?"

"No, no. You are thinking of racketeers. It was nothing like that. André wanted only to paint."

If he had not left of his own free will, then he had been kidnapped. Or murdered. Murder was probably not unknown along that street. But what was the motive?

Quite suddenly Susan thought of Jim Byrne. But he had been out of town for a week following a difficult assignment that had to do with an extradition case then usurping newspaper space. And besides, Jim had not seen the appeal in the girl's soft dark eyes.

"But André has been gone only two nights," Susan said. "Surely you need not——" She never knew what she had intended to say, for the girl whirled suddenly toward her. Her white face and dark eyes looked tragic.

"I am afraid," said the girl tensely. "There is something wrong about the house. Something terribly wrong. Something —— Here is the house, Miss Dare."

She turned, and Susan looked up at the darkly looming house above them and was conscious of a wish that Jim had returned. Well, she could leave if she wanted to. There was nothing at all to keep her there.

A heavy door, stained with many years of Chicago's smoke, closed behind them, and Susan blinked in the mellow light of a spacious and somewhat elegant

entrance hall. The house had been evidently one of the half circle about Chicago of one-time beautiful residences that gave way gradually to the encroachments of warehouses and factories and the steady wave of foreign breadwinners.

Then Mariette was leading her to the wide doorway and into a long crowded living room—crowded with furniture, crowded with plants in pots, crowded with embroidered and laced cushions.

There were two people in the room. A woman of perhaps fifty sat under a light, with her sleek, dark hair bent over something like a cushion on her lap. Not far from her a man at a table played some kind of card game.

"Madame," said Mariette, "it is my friend, Miss Dare."

Madame turned, and the light fell strongly upon her. She was dark and heavy and scrupulously neat. Her features were coarse and strong and swarthy. Her eyes were very black, she had a faint mustache across her upper lip, and there were two black marks like warts on one lower eyelid which gave her an extremely sinister look.

She looked Susan up and down. Clearly Madame Touseau's roomers had to pass some test and standard hidden away back in Madame Touseau's Gallic mind. Clearly, too, there was something about Susan which did not altogether please Madame Touseau.

She said something in quick French to Mariette, and Susan caught only Mariette's reply, which was something about a department store and seemed to reassure Madame.

She smiled, disclosing strong yellow teeth. "You may have one of my rooms," she said. "I'll show you at once. A friend of Mariette's ——" She did not finish, and Susan felt that Mariette had vouched for her respectability. The man at the table flipped the cards together with a sigh.

Madame was rolling up intricate white threads. She was an expert lace-maker, for her strong broad hands were inconceivably quick and delicate in their touch. The tiny wooden bobbins clicked faintly against each other as she put down the cushion upon which she worked and which held, firmly pinned, the lace she was making.

"Is it as hot outdoors as it is inside?" said the man at the table, turning to watch.

"Worse," said Mariette. "Miss Dare, this is Mr. Kinder."

Kinder rose and bowed. He was a man of somewhat uncertain age, with a thin face and shoulders and a surprising thickness of body upon long thin legs. His hair was black and he wore a straggly beard, black also. His eyes looked tired and wearily sharp. A small muscle near his mouth twitched as he said something polite to Susan.

Madame said abruptly: "Will you come with me, Miss Dare? I

must ask you to sign my guest register. This is not the hotel nor the rooming house, but one is obliged to follow the letter of the law, nevertheless."

She snapped on the light above a long blotter-covered table in the hall, and pulled forward a small ledger.

"Your name, please, and former address. And your occupation."

Susan sat down slowly in the chair Madame pulled forward and took the pen. Madame was taking no chances—yet perhaps the register was demanded by law and not, as it looked, a ruse to protect herself against unwelcome guests.

Susan looked at the names written on the page Madame placed before her. Looked, and her eyes became thoughtful.

Mariette had not been mistaken then. There was something wrong about the house. Aware of Madame's brooding regard, Susan slowly wrote her name and address in the space below Louis Malmin. Taking advantage of Mariette's statement that she was out of a job, she left the occupation unnamed.

Madame read it and led the way upstairs. The room to which she showed Susan was terrifically hot and airless but scrupulously clean. Susan opened the windows as soon as Madame had gone.

The night was hot and still, too, with not a breath of air moving. Away off somewhere she could hear the faint rush of an elevated train, muffled by heat and distance. Above her was the third-floor studio from which André Cavalliere had so curiously vanished. Tomorrow she would examine it at her leisure.

Mariette, coming quietly to the door, told her definitely of the arrangement of the rooms which Madame had let to her guests. Mariette's own room was beside Susan's with a vacant room beyond that. Across the back of the house was another vacant room.

"Madame, herself," said Mariette, "has the large room at the front of the house, at the head of the stairs. Across the hall is Mr. Kinder's room: it is the largest and best room, and he pays more than the rest of us. Then beside his room is that of Louis."

"Louis Malmin, is it?"

"Yes. Louis Malmin. An importer of oriental things. He is here for the Century of Progress."

"How long has he been here?"

"Nearly two years. He knows André. André did some silhouettes for him. They are on good terms."

"Who is Kinder?"

"He was here when I came two years ago. He is a retired salesman. He is not in good health."

"Does he know André?"

"Oh, yes. We are all well acquainted. Madame calls us her family."

Susan had not been strongly impressed with a sense of the sincerity of Madame's sentiment. Still, a tiger could purr for its

food and hide the unsheathing of its claws.

"It's late," said Susan. "We'll talk in the morning."

But after Mariette had gone, she sat at the window for a long time. Madame, Mariette, Kinder, and Louis Malmin. André Cavalliere who had vanished in that hot, silent house.

Two nights ago, when André Cavalliere had gone to his attic studio and vanished, there had been only four others in the house. Had one of them had something to do with that disappearance?

In the silence of the night it seemed possible.

Down the hall Madame was waiting like a sleeping tiger behind her closed roor. Susan felt altogether sure that Madame would know of any sound or movement on the stairway or along the hall. If André Cavalliere had gone out that night, Madame would have known of it. But if he had not gone out, what had happened to him?

It was not a pleasant thought, and it haunted Susan through a long and stifling night.

Morning dawned; the air was still hot and misty, and it was an effort to breathe. While the others were at breakfast in the dining room downstairs Mariette took Susan up to the third floor.

"I took the key," she said, unlocking the low door that led directly from the stairway into the wide, long room which extended, except where it had been walled up under the eaves, over the entire space of the house. The walls and low ceiling had been plastered and were hung with a variety of paintings.

At one end was a sort of kitchen, with a small gas plate and a table and some shelves. Along one side and behind a screen was a couch and a mirror and dressing table.

"There," said Mariette, pointing, and Susan bent to look closely at the small congregation of shaving tools—the shaving brush had dried, but little white ribbons of soap clung to it as if they had just been squeezed out of the tube of shaving soap that lay beside it, except that they too had dried. A safety razor was there, also.

It was, of course, exactly what Mariette had already described to her, but as she looked at the bits of white soap and the unused razor blade, Susan found herself convinced: André Cavalliere had not intended to disappear. That much, at least, was certain.

"Have you found something?"

"No more than you told me," said Susan. "Where was the money hidden?"

Mariette led the way quickly to the fireplace at the front of the room. The brick was loose, and it was evident—or would have been evident to a searcher—that it was loose. So probably the money had had nothing to do with the thing. Except to indicate again

that André Cavalliere had not intended to disappear.

Susan looked thoughtfully about the room. It was evidently here that he had worked and lounged. There were shabby but comfortable-looking chairs. Easels. A paint-smeared table. Ash trays. A small rug or two, very thin and worn. Queer that the rugs were arranged with so little regard for need or symmetry. One was flung crookedly before the fireplace. One was straight enough below a chair, but the chair had been placed so that it stood at an awkward angle to the rest of the room.

Susan walked over to the chair.

Odd that the chair was placed so carefully in the very center of the rug. Odd——

Someone was coming up the attic stairs.

Madame opened the door; her dark eyes swept keenly over Susan and Mariette.

"So Mariette has been telling you her troubles," she said harshly. "Mariette is a silly girl. The young man has gone. Yes. But it is not for Mariette to find him. He will return if he so desires. Your breakfast," said Madame firmly, "is waiting."

Madame too possessed a key to the studio room, and she locked the door firmly behind them. Susan saw Mariette's slender hand close upon her own key.

It was as they reached the second floor again that the incident occurred that was, then, so trivial. And that was the breakfast tray, laden with soiled dishes and a crumpled napkin, which stood upon the bottom step. Madame halted as she saw it, then swept forward, took it up in her wide hands, and looked at Susan and Mariette.

"Mr. Malmin," she said, "had breakfast in his own room this morning. Agnes is very careless. She ought not to have put the tray on the steps."

She turned, and her thin black dress billowed out after her as she went down the steps to the first floor. As they followed, Susan put out her hand silently toward Mariette who, understanding, gave her the key to the studio.

When, an hour later, Susan went to her room again, Madame was sitting in her own room with the door wide open and herself in such a position as to command a view of the entire length of the corridor and the entrance to the narrow third-floor stairway. Susan opened her door, ostensibly to catch any stirring of cool air, and took up a book, and thus entered upon a prolonged and silent duel with the black-eyed Frenchwoman. Mariette came nervously into the corridor now and then, looked at Susan and at Madame, and vanished again.

John Kinder's door remained closed. But once another man, short and stocky and supple, with a dark, hawk-like face, emerged

from the room directly opposite Susan's, gave her a quick, keen look, and went down the stairway.

That was, of course, the man Mariette had called Louis Malmin. He looked, Susan was bound to admit, fully capable of accomplishing all the crimes in the Decalogue, alone and unaided. But there was nothing to link him with André. Nothing, indeed, so far, to link André with any of them except Mariette. Unless Madame's vigilance was a clue to—well, to what?

It was late in the afternoon when Susan contrived an errand to take Madame's attention. Although it was actually Mariette who induced the Frenchwoman to examine the money she had taken from André's room. They were downstairs in the living room by that time, and Madame was still vigilant.

"Money!" said Madame. "You took money from his room! How much?"

"I—haven't counted it," said Mariette with unexpected guile. "I thought it was safer with me. Do you want to look at it?"

Madame looked at Susan and looked at Mariette. It was, however, Susan thought, the only bait to which she would have risen.

"Perhaps I'd better see it," she said. "If André Cavalliere does not return, I shall be obliged to claim this money. He owes me —you understand?"

Quietly Susan followed them. When she heard Mariette close the door to her room she hurried along the corridor and, at last, up the steps to the third floor again. She was always glad that Mariette had not been with her when she moved the chair and looked under the rug.

For under the rug, plain against the old pine floor was a queer, irregular mark. It was not blood —but blood had been there and had been recently and thoroughly washed. Susan sat back on her heels and looked at that mark.

Madame's vigilance took on a new and sinister meaning. That meant, then, that she knew something of the thing that had happened here.

Susan rose.

It did not take long to look carefully over the entire studio, for André Cavalliere had not been widely possessed of this world's goods. Indeed, the only thing of interest Susan found was that André had smoked many cigarettes since the ash trays had been emptied. And that he had sketched everybody in the house in every possible pose.

Susan glanced rapidly through the portfolio crammed with sketches that lay on the broad table. There was Madame—Madame in workaday black; Madame's glossy head bent over her lace; Madame facing her, with lids drooped over her dark eyes. There were sketches of John Kinder, his beard waggish and

shaven and church-wardenish in turns. Sketches of Louis Malmin —one apparently a joke on the part of the artist, in which Louis Malmin appeared with a handkerchief tied round his head, huge rings in his ears, a wide knife between his white teeth, and something that was not a joke looking out of his eyes.

There were sketches of a woman of great beauty of feature who looked vaguely familiar to Susan. There were sketches of Mariette—many of them. Susan closed the portfolio and put it under her arm.

She paused to replace the rug and the chair. Who had placed them there? Who had scrubbed in cold water that stain below until it was lighter than all the rest of the floor? Who—she bent over and took in her fingers a small object that lay wedged into the cushions of the chair so that only its blunt end had showed, and she stood there a moment, turning it in her fingers slowly.

It was a small wooden bobbin. The kind that is used in making lace.

She closed her hand upon it. The attic was growing rapidly darker, and the heat was becoming sultry, as it does before an electrical storm. Madame's hands, strong and broad, making lace assiduously. Madame's hands carrying that breakfast tray. Madame's hands scrubbing out the stain on the floor. She was somehow sure that the Frenchwoman had done that.

Susan decided she'd had enough of the attic and started for the stairway.

The hall below was empty and rather dark. But as she went quietly along it toward her own room a door away down at the end opened, and Madame's figure was silhouetted against the light from a window in the room beyond.

That room was vacant. Why had Susan so strong an impression that there was someone in the room? Was it something about the fleeting glimpse of a turn of Madame's head—a feeling that words had been quickly hushed?

At first Susan thought that, in the sudden dusk of the narrow corridor, Madame did not see her. But she opened her own door and a soft shaft of greenish light from the window beyond struck her face and she saw that black-clad figure hesitate.

There was a small bolt on the door, and Susan fastened it against unexpected interruption before she opened the portfolio and spread the sketches in a wide circle around her on the floor.

Slowly she arranged them so that all the sketches of one person were in a group, and she studied, fascinated, the results of that arrangement.

She had known these people always—she had known those varying expressions familiarly and

long. Thus Madame looked when she was pleased; purring and complacent because a new lodger was prompt in paying. So Madame looked when intent on her lace-making. So when she was in festive mood. Thus when she was angry.

Louis Malmin in as many moods; studying them, there was one thing always predominant in the hawk-like, piratical face with its small dark eyes that were just a bit too close set, and that was acquisitiveness. Greed. A subordination of everything else in life to an overmastering need for gain.

Yes, perhaps André Cavalliere's only forte lay in a strange flair for character divination—so that, with one stroke of a pencil, he could place driving greed in Louis Malmin's eyes.

John Kinder, with time at his disposal, had posed exhaustively. Here he was in a dozen aspects, and Susan lingered over each. Here was Mariette, too.

Susan looked at those sketches for a long time, and when she had finished was convinced of one thing at least, and that was that the artist had loved Mariette. He had not of his own volition left her. But then she had known that already. Poor little Mariette.

It was so dark when Susan pulled herself from a reverie into which she had plunged and turned to the last group of pictures that she had to reach up and turn on the single electric globe that hung from the ceiling in order to see the face of the unknown woman. There were only two poses of her, and as the bright light poured garishly down upon it, Susan remembered where she had seen that face with its almost too perfect regularity of feature.

It was certainly that of the woman who had emerged so swiftly from the dusk the previous night while Susan was waiting for Mariette. The woman who had slipped quickly up the steps, fleetingly under the light and into the church of Notre Dame.

Susan frowned and pushed back her soft light hair. Did that entirely account for the familiarity of that perfectly regular face? And if it was a face she had seen somewhere, whose was it?

She sighed and wished the storm would blow over, and fell to studying the pictures again. She lingered very long over one sketch.

Moments passed while the sky slowly darkened and the hot still house awaited the storm. And by the time Mariette knocked timidly at the door, Susan knew things that she had not known before.

The sound of the knock roused her from a queer, rather terrifying thought that André Cavalliere had left behind him what was, in effect, a record of his death.

For he had been murdered. Susan was sure of that. To inform the police would be, just then, futile. She could say: *I think this man was murdered because there's*

a mark on the floor of his studio that has recently been scrubbed and which I think was blood. Because he has disappeared. Because his sketch portfolio holds certain faces in certain poses. They would say and rightly: *Where is the body?*

If she knew only a little more —and that little was something that had nothing to do with the blind, fumbling search into currents of thought and feeling around her that was at once Susan's strength and Susan's weakness.

She smiled a little wryly. If Jim had been there it would have helped. Without him she must herself confirm instinct—if that was what it was—with reason. With clues. With definite evidence.

"Come in," she said to Mariette's knock, and then remembered the door was bolted and scrambled to her feet to open it.

As Mariette entered, pale as a ghost in her limp white dress, Susan scooped up the sketches, permitting one of the woman of Notre Dame to remain on top.

"Do you know this woman?"

"No," said Mariette. "But it's one of André's sketches."

"You've never seen her?"

"N-no. That is, there's something vaguely familiar about her. But I'm sure I don't know her. And I never saw this sketch before."

"Has there been any time since you knew André when this woman could have been in the house without your knowing it?"

"Oh, yes. I was on tour for six weeks, last fall. She could have been here then. Louis Malmin was gone at that time, too, on a business trip. And—yes, I remember, that was the time when Mr. Kinder was gone, too. A vacation trip, he said, of about a week. But if she was here then—this woman, I mean—André didn't tell me. You don't mean —you don't think he's gone with her?" Her dark eyes sought Susan beseechingly.

"No," said Susan gently. "He has not gone with her. Has Madame Touseau any family? Any children or—any relatives at all?"

Mariette shook her head. "No. Except that I believe she has a niece somewhere in California. But I've never seen her. And Madame keeps very much to herself. She often says her—well, she calls us all guests, you know —are her only family."

Mariette hesitated. "I'm afraid," she said, "that Madame knows why you are here. She asked me—oh, a great many questions. She—" Mariette shivered a little in that hot, still room —*"she watches us so."*

Susan delved into confused thoughts and went back for something, some word that had been spoken, that must be explored.

She must herself this time, without Jim's help, confirm with hard fact the findings of the queer

divining rod of her own consciousness. Of the blind little tentacles of something that was so dangerously like intuition and yet was not quite that either.

The silence lay as heavy as the leaves outside. Then Susan said: "Mariette—I want you to go out and get me some things, and I don't want Madame to see them when you return."

She paused, glancing at the open transom. The she crossed to the window and examined the old-fashioned shade and the light rod that held the hem of it flat.

"Bring me," said Susan Dare, "all the movie magazines you can find. And a mirror—a shaving mirror will do, but I'd rather have one of those small make-up mirrors: you've seen them. They have a little standard and are about six inches in diameter. And at dinner tonight when everyone is seated at the table I want you to tell Madame that you are going to inform the police of André's disappearance. Make it emphatic. And again, when I talk of André, follow my lead. Agree with me."

"Yes," said Mariette and was gone.

Susan hid the sketches and opened her door. Madame's door was closed. Probably she had taken up her observation post in the drawing room downstairs. Susan looked about her room, discovered a small push-botton bell, and rang it.

Her little plan, however, failed. Either the bell was disconnected or Agnes, the somewhat mysterious servant, was busy in the kitchen. Susan rang several times, but there was still no answer.

Well, the matter of Agnes could wait. But she must know who was in that supposedly vacant room. Or rather who was not in the room.

But again she failed. For though she managed to approach the closed door to the room at the back of the house without, so far as she knew, having been seen, there was no sound from within.

She listened, bending her head to the blank dark panels and holding her breath. But there was no sound at all on the other side of that door. She wanted to knock; she wanted to open the door. But something about the silence and the darkness of the place held her silent, too, and not too certain of herself.

After all, a man had been murdered in that house—murdered deliberately and in cold blood. She was as certain of that as she was ever in her whole life certain of anything.

And the murder had been skillfully, carefully concealed. So skillfully and so carefully that there remained no evidence at all to show that it had been done. No evidence but the thin brown mark around that clean spot under the rug. No evidence but the sketches in Cavalliere's portfolio.

But the murderer had made one

mistake. And that night, if Susan's conclusions were right, there would be an attempt to make that mistake right.

And what could she do then? She would need help—and she must be sure.

There was still no rustle of motion within that room. Susan went quietly back to her own room, took her hat and, boldly this time, went through the hall and down the stairs.

Madame, bent over her lace, looked up. John Kinder let a card fall from his hand and looked up also.

"I'm going out a bit," said Susan. "If Mariette asks for me, won't you tell her I've gone for a little walk?"

Madame's black eyes plunged across the dusk into Susan's.

"The door," said Madame calmly, "is locked. And I have the key. Mariette has just gone out for a little walk, too. But I shouldn't advise Miss Dare to go. Because," said Madame Touseau slowly, "it is about to storm. Mademoiselle would not like to be caught in a storm."

Susan gripped the stair railing. Absurd that her heart had leaped so suddenly to pound in her throat.

She shot a glance at John Kinder. But he had gone placidly back to his card game as if altogether unaware of the threat in Madame's heavy voice.

Susan left the stairway, but Madame reached the door first. Her thick body was an indomitable barrier.

"That gown," said the Frenchwoman, "is too beautiful—too expensive to permit to be ruined. Me, I know the handsome dressmaking. I am not one to be deceived about that—that," she repeated slowly, "or other things. I do not believe Miss Dare wishes the walk in the rain. No."

It was then an open threat. Yet the woman could not keep her jailed for long in that house.

Susan thought swiftly. It was time for which the woman was playing. She must need time—otherwise her opposition would have taken an entirely different line. Susan restrained a desire to combat the woman openly; for an instant the thought of physical struggle over the key, a mad desire to escape, to be gone from that fetid, silent house with the stain of blood overhead, clutched at Susan as hysteria would clutch.

But the Frenchwoman was stronger. And there was Kinder. And behind Susan quite suddenly on the steps another voice spoke. The words, however, were altogether commonplace.

"Madame Touseau," said Louis Malmin quietly, "may I have dinner a little early tonight?"

As if a puzzle had given itself a jerk so that pieces which had been distorted and confused fell suddenly into a regular and ordinary pattern, so, all at once the

queer little scene changed and became regular and ordinary. Susan's breath began to come freely. Madame's dark face was smooth and efficient as she spoke calmly to Louis Malmin.

She had merely advised Susan not to go out in the rain. That was all.

"Will you unlock the door, Madame Touseau?" said Susan. "I wish to go out before the rain."

Her dark eyes met Susan's and glowed. Then she smiled and said: "But certainly, if one wishes." She turned and opened the door. "However—when the storm comes it will be bad."

Susan was conscious of Kinder's face turned inquiringly toward her; of Louis Malmin's presence there on the stairway behind her. But the door to the street stood open, and Susan walked past Madame and out upon the steps.

A string of shops ought to be found a street or two beyond, for Susan remembered vaguely a patch of radiance off toward her right as she and Mariette had walked from the church the night before. She turned that way.

Her easy victory was perplexing; it led Susan to doubt her own conclusions. For it was as if Madame had warned her merely to go no further but had scorned, smilingly, any notion that Susan was already in possession of a fact that might be dangerous.

It became clearer to Susan that the little episode had been merely a warning on Madame Touseau's part. Madame, then, was very sure of herself. But she did not know that Susan had seen the sketches. She did not know that one of her own wooden bobbins was at that moment in Susan's white handbag. She did not know that Susan had seen the woman on the church steps.

Yet perhaps the entire fabric of reasoning that Susan had built up was wrong. Perhaps she had missed some salient and pivotal fact.

Few corners are without drugstores and the corner upon which Susan emerged was no exception. It was small and crowded at the soda fountain where perspiring and frenzied clerks dealt out tall, iced glasses. Susan supplied herself with nickles and went to the little row of mahogany-stained telephone booths at the back.

The telephone number of the *Record* is famous in Chicago. Susan called it and waited. Jim had been out of town yesterday, of course; but that didn't mean that he was not in town today. If he had not returned, she didn't know exactly what to do next; it would be best, perhaps, simply to wait. But she wasn't sure that she dared wait.

It was terrifically hot in the little booth. A faraway voice said it was the *Record* and referred her to another voice which hesitated and then to Susan's immense relief, turned and called distantly:

"Hey, Jim! This is for you!"

"Hello—hello——"

It was Jim Byrne. "Jim," said Susan in a small voice, "oh, Jim, I'm so glad you are here."

"Oh, hello, Sue. What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I don't know, but I think it's murder——"

"My God!" said Jim. "In this heat!"

"I think I know who did it."

"Where are you? Where's the body?"

"I'm at Sibley and Loomis——"

"What?" shouted Jim.

"At Sibley and Loomis," repeated Susan firmly. "In a drug-store in a booth."

Then Jim said: "You sound scared. Stay there where you are. I'll be there in—oh, ten minutes. 'Bye."

Susan sat down at a table. "Two tall lemonades," she said to the white-aproned boy who approached. "With lots of ice."

"Two?" he said, eyeing Susan as if measuring her capacity.

Jim bettered his promise by three minutes. "Angel," he said looking at the frosted glass, "is that for me?"

"Drink it," said Susan. "And don't ask me questions till I've finished. Jim, is there anyone who might be in hiding there at Madame Touseau's? That is a rooming house in the French quarter. Someone a great deal in the public eye; someone who would want to escape attention?"

He grinned. "A lot of people, my Susan. The guy I've been trying to locate for one." He took a long swallow and added: "But everybody says he's got out of the country. Best for his health. You've read about the Anton Burgess disclosures. As long as he can stay out of sight a whole lot of fellows here in Chicago are that much better off. There's an embezzlement charge."

Susan frowned. "Yes, I read that. Jim, can you come back there with me? You see, I've got some sketches that I want to show you. The main facts of the thing are simple. A man by the name of André Cavalliere, an artist, engaged to marry little Mariette Berne——"

"Berne," said Jim. "That little ballet dancer?"

"Yes. He—well, he just vanished. I think he's murdered."

"Why?"

"Because," said Susan, "there's blood on the attic floor. And it's been washed."

Jim gave her a long look. Then he beckoned to the boy. "Two more drinks," he said. "Whose blood, Susan?"

"I want you to see the sketches," she said obliquely. "I want to know if you see in them what I see." She frowned again. "Burgess," she said thoughtfully. "Yes, that might be right."

Jim put down his glass. "Look here, Susan," he said earnestly, "if you've stumbled over Anton

Burgess, lead me there, Miss Santa Claus. Every paper in the United States has been trying to find him for nearly two years."

Susan shook her head. "Are you sure you would recognize him if you saw him?"

"Yes," he said. "I believe so —you're keeping something back, Susan. What is it?"

She shook her head again. "I want you to see it for yourself," she said. "I may be wrong."

He stared at her over the empty glasses. His blue eyes were thoughtful; his irregular but agreeable features were intent. "All right," he said. "Are we apt to need reinforcements?"

"Police? No. It's a case for your Irish tongue, Jim. I think," said Susan slowly, "that we've got a lever that you can work."

He flipped the coins to the weary boy. They emerged upon a heat-stricken street. They turned toward Notre Dame.

"I'd forgotten there was a French quarter," said Jim. "What a place for anyone to hide! A forgotten section in the middle of a great city. Hedged in completely with little foreign worlds. Tell me all, Sue."

"Well," said Susan cautiously, "I've made a little plan. It's not much. But it may work. I sent Mariette for some movie magazines. And a small mirror."

"The mirror," said Jim, "suggests a periscope. But I'll be damned if I know what you want movie magazines for. And how are you going to get me in this place? Tell them you've picked up a boy-friend?"

"I don't know," said Susan, eyeing him doubtfully. "I don't think even money would persuade Madame to take another lodger just now. Especially a suspiciously well-tailored one arriving promptly upon my return. I believe the simplest way will be best—that is, for me to let you in while the others are at dinner."

It was quite simple. The house was very much darker than the street and though a light burned in the drawing room there was no one to see Jim cross the hall.

Susan was never to forget the dinner—her first and last dinner —in Madame Touseau's house. She was always to remember the narrow room with its brown walls, its mirrored built-in sideboard, and its heavy hanging center light. There was unexpectedly good linen and soup, and Madame, erect, with her black hair and eyes gleaming, presided quite as if they were in truth her guests.

Louis Malmin was directly opposite Susan. John Kinder ate sparingly of what appeared to be a vegetable diet and said very little. As Susan appeared, Mariette uttered a little gasp of relief which she tried to cover by saying something about the storm.

A window had been opened, and now and then a hot breath of air swept the lace curtain inward

and then sucked it back against the screen. Wasn't that an indication of a cyclonic area? thought Susan, accepting chicken gumbo and her first glimpse of the servant, Agnes, at the same time.

Agnes was a plain, fat little woman, about as mysterious as a post, and she retired immediately to the kitchen.

Mariette lifted her dark eyes and looked straight at Madame Touseau. "I think I'd better tell you," she said, "that I am going to call the police tomorrow morning."

Madame's face darkened, and she shot a swift suspicious glance at Susan. "You mean to investigate the departure of André?"

"Exactly," said Mariette with unaccustomed decision.

Madame's broad hands fingered the silver beside her plate.

John Kinder paused with a forkful of lettuce in the air to look in a mildly reproving manner at Mariette, and Louis Malmin ate steadily.

"There are some sketches that André's made," said Susan. "They are very interesting sketches. So interesting that we thought the police might be able to——" She stopped herself abruptly, as if she had said more than she had intended to say.

There was a little silence.

Then Madame said: "Sketches. What kind of sketches?"

"Oh, nothing much. Just little bits of—everyday things. Street scenes—people." Susan hoped she was making the right impression of flurried retraction.

"What people?" said Madame heavily.

Susan said nothing, and John Kinder let the lettuce travel to his mouth and said through it, mildly:

"Me, for one. I used to pose for André often. But I don't quite see how this young lady expects the sketches he made to help solve the problem of his disappearance. And I do think police investigation is quite uncalled for."

Mariette repeated: "I'm going to call the police."

Louis Malmin rose suddenly, spoke briefly to Madame, and left the dining room.

After that, nothing more was said of police, though John Kinder kept up a mild barrage of conversation which covered Madame's glooming silence and the genetral air of discomfiture that silence induced.

Under cover of the little confusion of pushing back chairs Mariette whispered to Susan: "I found the woman that André sketched in one of the movie magazines. She is Sally Gowdy."

Sally Gowdy. One of the near-stars in the movies. That was why she knew the face.

"Go with the others," whispered Susan, and as Mariette disappeared, Agnes came to the table.

"Agnes," said Susan directly, "for how many days have you been arranging extra trays?"

Agnes blinked, hesitated, and was lost. "Since Monday," she said. "And I don't see where Mr. Malmin puts it all. Six meals a day that makes for him! Besides the extra work!"

Thoughtfully Susan returned to the living room. Madame had taken up her lace-making again.

Mariette had waited for her, and she and Susan walked quietly toward the stairs. Over the banisters Susan saw that John Kinder was again mildly intent upon his card game. And as she paused at her own room, she caught a gleam of light from the transom above Malmin's door.

"Go on to your room, Mariette," she said in a whisper. "Lock the door, and don't let anyone—anyone, mind you—in the room. Not on any pretext."

Mariette, her small face white and ghostly in the dusk, nodded and vanished.

Jim switched off a flashlight as Susan entered. She turned on the light. The sketches were again spread, but fanwise on the floor. And the movie magazines had been rummaged and tossed aside. He knew, then. And beside the door was an odd little contraption which consisted of a mirror fastened stoutly to the end of a light wood rod, obviously taken from the head of the window shade.

His eyes were black with excitement and jubilance. "Susan," he said in a low voice, "You've got him. It's Burgess beyond all doubt. But it took an artist to penetrate the disguise. This fellow André Cavalliere was clever—too clever for his own good. Now then, what's the program? Your periscope is ready. Are the sketches the bait?"

"That," said Susan, calmly accepting Jim's immediate comprehension, "that and a threat of police in the morning. They'll do something tonight."

"They'll do something," said Jim, "right now. Better turn out your light."

Susan did so. Afterward she remembered that as they started their queer vigil, there was a sudden roll of thunder, close at hand and reverberating threateningly in the hushed, hot room.

Jim held the improvised periscope, which worked remarkably well, and Susan stood beside him, her eyes glued to the small reflection of the head of the stairs and a patch of corridor.

"I think," said Jim in a whisper, "that I've got the main points. But there are some completely mysterious gaps. For instance, Sally Gowdy——"

"Sh-h——" breathed Susan. "You'll see, soon. There's Madame——"

It was queer to stand there in the darkness and watch Madame, a quickly moving figure with a white face, pause at the head of the stairs, look swiftly about her, and then glide directly toward

them. Jim turned the mirror carefully so they could catch a glimpse of the back of the hall in time to see Madame disappear into the supposedly vacant room at its end.

There was another short wait. For the storm in all its pent-up fury swooped furiously upon the house with wind and rain and wild lightning that lit the small room eerily and then was gone.

And probably the tumult and frenzy of sound outside induced the murderer of André Cavalliere to do what must be done under cover of all that turmoil. A door along the hall opened. And a figure slipped quietly toward the attic stairway.

The mirror jerked to follow it, and Susan put her hand on Jim's arm. "Wait," she whispered. "Not yet. Wait——"

Jim would have remonstrated but she clutched his arm tighter, and he waited.

But, of course, Jim didn't know that she had no proof. That the figure that had slipped up those attic stairs must be trapped in another way.

Susan never knew how much longer they waited. The figure that had gone to the studio did not return. But finally the door at the end of the hall must have opened, for all at once there was a woman in the mirror—a woman who now crept silently along the corridor.

Susan's fingers were tight on the hard muscle of Jim's forearm. "Now!" she said and the little mirrored picture vanished as Jim flung open the door.

The woman stopped, and screamed and put her hands over her face. Then Madame Touseau was there, too.

Susan saw the glint of a revolver suddenly in Jim's hand, and the sight was comforting.

Madame cried: "What is the meaning of this? Who is the man? What——" She had grasped the meaning of it at once and was glaring at Susan. "You did this?" she panted.

And Jim's hand wavered suddenly on the revolver as the woman in the corridor lifted her head. "My God," he said, "it's Sally Gowdy herself!" He turned to Susan. "Where's Burgess?"

"Burgess," said Susan rapidly, "is upstairs in the attic, looking for the sketches. But I'm sure Madame Touseau would rather confess what she knows of the murder of André Cavalliere than have Miss Gowdy involved in a murder investigation. If you confess, Madame, merely to what you know, Miss Gowdy will be permitted to leave before the police come.

"You see," she said to Jim, "Miss Gowdy is Madame's niece. But, probably for publicity's sake, she does not want it known that this is her home. She arrived for a secret visit two days before the murder occurred. Madame

tried to conceal the murder in order to keep Miss Gowdy out of it. It was most unfortunate that she was secretly in the house at the time. It would be still more unfortunate if the police investigation discovered her. So Madame undertook to keep them away.

"I am sure," said Susan, meaning the opposite, "that Madame would not have taken money from Burgess for her silence."

Madame's fixed dark eyes did not flicker. She said grimly: "Isn't there a thing called being an accessory after the fact?"

"There is," said Jim. "But we already know that you concealed the murder. You may as well tell it all."

"Murder——" Mariette was among them suddenly and stood swaying, her eyes wide and piteous. "He's—dead, then—"

Madame's lips were tight. "He's dead, you little fool," she said. "But I know only that there was blood spilled. I didn't see him dead. And I didn't help remove the body——"

"The body," she whispered.

"It's in the Chicago River, I suppose," said Madame. "Burgess got rid of it that night. Does it matter?"

A crash of thunder held them silent and transfixed for a queer moment or two. Mariette's white face was blurred, and Sally Gowdy's beauty was an empty mask, and the little black spots on Madame's eyelid worked and twitched, while thunder submerged them, shaking the house, and slowly rolled away. And on its heels came a violent, sharper sound from over their heads.

Jim sprang toward the stairway, and Louis Malmin's door opened, and quite suddenly they were all surging up those narrow steps and into the attic.

John Kinder was slumped over a chair. There was a table beside him, and on the table a scrap of paper. He had died instantly.

The note was confused, yet clear enough.

"You've got me," he had scrawled. "I can't find the sketches. I've known it was coming. The artist fellow recognized me and told me. But I didn't know that he had made a sketch of me as I really looked. That is what the girl meant. After he told me, there was nothing else for me to do. I used the same revolver that is here beside me. I forced the Touseau woman to conceal the fact. She was ready to do it for many reasons. But she had nothing to do with the murder. I'm ready to go. I've been hunted. I'm tired. The notes on the embezzlement case are in my trunk."

It was signed Anton Burgess, with a broken line below Burgess.

"Look," Susan said, "at the line below. It's broken for the downward stroke of the 'g.' That's how I knew, you see, that Kinder wasn't his real name. That a man in the house was using a name not

his own. He had the same kind of line under it, but that was no reason for it to be broken, for the 'd' below which the break appears has no downward stroke.

"And the line extended beyond the following two letters to about the space of another letter. Thus I supposed that his real name had had seven letters with a consonant in the middle of it that went downward. The flourish of a line below his name was too strong a habit for him to break—especially when there was nothing that seemed betraying about two short lines. It told me where to look."

That was later, when she was showing Jim the register and comparing the mark below the signature of John Kinder with the mark below that of Anton Burgess.

It was still later, and the storm had died, when they left the Touseau house and walked slowly toward Notre Dame.

"The sketches were the betraying evidence," said Jim thoughtfully. "Without the beard, with light hair instead of dark hair, and a youthful figure—Burgess was very much younger than he appeared as John Kinder—he was immediately recognizable as Burgess. It must have been on the artist's part a bit of idle fun.

"He couldn't have dreamed what it would cost him—unless, of course, he wanted money from Burgess to keep his secret. And Burgess knew where that would lead. How did you know about Sally Gowdy?" Jim asked Susan.

"I didn't" said Susan, "until I realized that the woman of Notre Dame and the woman in the sketches were the same. Therefore, that she must be here now and must have been sometime connected with the place. Then Mariette said she thought Madame had a niece in California and, I thought of the movies. And it was luck that her picture was in one of the magazines. And since Agnes had been taking trays upstairs for two days *before* the murder, I knew it couldn't be André who was concealed in that supposedly vacant room.

"Then I realized that the movie actress and Madame would do everything possible to escape becoming involved in a murder case. I don't know why she didn't leave at once—Sally Gowdy, I mean. But, of course, I knew she would leave at once after Mariette had said she would call the police."

Notre Dame loomed darkly above them into the clear night.

"Do you realize," said Jim in a hushed voice, "what a furor this news is going to make? Anton Burgess found at last—I've got to hustle, Susan! This is one time when I've got a real scoop."

"I know." She looked up at the dim outline of a cross against the sky. "Poor little Mariette," she said. "She was such a harmless little thing to be caught in such a big wheel . . . All right, Jim. I'm coming."

no time to lie

by . . . Eugene Pawley

The day was dull, time was heavy and Smitty wanted a quick buck.

THEY HAD SMITTY on the fry at headquarters for six straight hours. He was pulling the oldest gag on the books and no one was wise. Cool for a while, then wilting into panic, Smitty was a blueprint for an innocent guy being framed. This Sergeant Tiernan, an old bulldog who took over the case because two of the department's best men were away, began to get uneasy.

"Sarge," Smitty moaned, "am I dumb enough to walk right back to a joint where I just lifted twenty grand worth of rocks? I'm tellin' you, when I hear you guys answerin' the alarm I'm ten blocks down the street!"

"I'm just old-fashioned enough to call in a couple of the boys," the sergeant snarled, "and we'll beat it out of you!" But his threat wobbled.

Smitty wrung his hands. "Can one guy be in two places at once? Am I Einstein or Houdini, so's I can get back to this Hunter's Jewelry before I've even been there?"

Tiernan swore vividly. He creaked his bulk up out of the chair and bumped on flattened arches to a window. The case was a loony. With that admission the

The uses of Professor Einstein's theory on bending Time must be wide and varied. We feel that even the benevolent Professor would not recognize his brain child in some wilder interpretations—this one, for instance.

Sergeant's jaws clamped on his one thought.

"Smitty," he grinned, as cold as a crack in a gravestone, "you're right. You're not that dumb. What's more, you ain't Einstein nor Houdini. But you pulled that job and came back for the pinch, and somewhere along the line you got yourself an alibi!"

Back in his cell Smitty had a hard time keeping the big laugh swallowed. Before the night was through Tiernan would be looking at his alibi. And it was an alibi that no rock-brained copper could bust.

Thinking through it again was like drinking sweet wine. Smitty came down the street, slow and happy in the warm sunshine, one in a million on the sidewalk. Smitty was more ordinary than a guy out of statistics. Medium height, hair in between colors, a face like a mob put together and clothes that matched. When he came to the corner where a sidewalk photographer pitched, he lounged idly.

"Candid camera shot, mister?" the seedy individual pleaded. "Two for a quarter. One for you and one for the girl friend!"

Smitty turned to the hardware store window. He checked the time on the square-faced electric clock. Three minutes to go. At fifteen minutes past three the two hands would be together. From where the photographer stood the clock would then seem to have but a single hand—until Smitty put his discovery into action, that is.

Yawning, he leaned casually forward, flipped the pencil from his sleeve and pressed its sticky glued side to the curved glass of the corner window. It held. The bright sunlight focused the pencil's shadow into a third hand on the clock, sharp and black. Instantly the dial read three-thirty.

Smitty leaned his arm over the pencil, blotting out the shadow. Fourteen minutes past three.

A giggling young couple posed for a snap. "Move closer. Hold it!" The lensman screwed up his face, then flicked a finger. "Swell."

The boy paid and pocketed his ticket. "I'll have your pictures ready tonight," the photo man told him. "My address is on the ticket."

With a simpleton's grin Smitty stepped in front of the window. The clock hands were lined up. The pencil's shadow added a quarter hour to the time.

"Well, okay, I'll take one," he said.

"Right there." The camera came up and shifted around and winked. "Here's your ticket. Picture, madam?"

While a sombre woman posed in his place, Smitty carelessly brushed the corner window and retrieved his pencil. Then he sauntered down the street, heading towards Hunter's.

There were a score of places he

might have worked. But Hunter's was expensive and had gone five years without a robbery to make the house men cautious. Smitty slowed his eager legs, timing himself down to seconds. At twenty-five minutes past three he was inside the quiet luxury jeweler. He forced a blush for the salesgirl at the ring counter.

"I want an engagement ring," he murmured with rehearsed embarrassment.

"Certainly," the girl smiled. She led him to a quiet corner.

Twenty-nine minutes past three now. But the evidence of the camera and the clock would prove him ten blocks away. There were four trays of the finest rings on the counter. As the girl bent for another Smitty calmly stacked the trays and made the door in one crouching streak. It was swinging on his heels before a piercing scream turned Hunter's into a bedlam.

Smitty jostled into the sidewalk crowd and was carried along to the alley. Swiftly he emptied the trays into a small stamped and addressed package, sealed it, fed it to the mail box at General Delivery while the sirens yowled past.

Ten minutes later he came back. He elbowed through the crowd outside Hunter's and gaped with the rest. "What's up?" he asked.

"Diamonds!" a newsboy whispered admiringly. "A guy just grabbed 'em from one of the dames and ran. See, that's her, with the cops."

Smitty saw the clerk. The clerk saw him, pointed, and gave out another scream before she passed out.

"Hey, whadda ya mean!" Smitty said indignantly as the cops put the bracelets on him. Sergeant Tiernan came up and they bundled him off to headquarters. Then, like a man panicked into a loss of memory, Smitty said nothing. Until the ticket was turned out of his pockets.

"I was just loafin' the afternoon away, Sarge," he pleaded. "I can't remember all the things I done. Had a beer, got this guy to take my picture . . ."

While Tiernan sent an officer to check with the photographer Smitty preened himself. Not by the flick of an eyelid had he slipped.

For the benefit of the guards he kept his expression anxious and blew nervous smoke through the bars of his cell, waiting for the word that his alibi had been checked.

Tiernan hunched over the desk, a reading glass at his nose. In his pudgy fingers cracked a roll of photo print. He straightened up to give Smitty an uncharitable glare.

"We've lost eight hours just working on you. You got a twin brother?"

"My brother's in . . ."

"We know," Tiernan cracked

viciously. "And here's your alibi. The clock couldn't be tampered with, the photo hasn't been retouched and we got the alarm twenty seconds after you had your picture taken!"

Smitty stared back at the officer with appropriate puzzlement. "What clock?"

Morosely the plainclothesman settled down over the streamer of film taken from the street photographer's camera.

"Smitty," he asked finally, "how did you work it?"

"Sarge, I'm tellin' ya, I did—"

Tiernan stood up. "Professor Einstein figures time can be bent. I wouldn't know about that. Neither would the D. A. or the jury. But *you* might."

His voice set into concrete, he pointed to a spot on the film. "At fourteen minutes past three by that clock this couple had their picture taken. Next on the film is yours, and the clock shows half past three. After you came a woman . . ."

"Sure." Smitty's voice thinned out. "I remember her." The color pulsed over his neck, faded to gray.

"All I want right now is them rings," Tiernan grinned. "You can show us how the clock works later."

"I'm tellin' ya . . ."

"This dame had her picture taken right *after* you," the sergeant boomed. "But the clock shows her *fifteen minutes before you!* You and Einstein, eh Smitty?"

DEAR READER:—*I'm told that some of you are having trouble getting every copy of* THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE *at your local news dealer. If you want to be sure of getting me regularly just fill out and mail the coupon below, and the best in new and old detective-mystery fiction will be yours to enjoy while my latest antics are the talk of the town.*

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the crooked coronet

by . . . Michael Arlen

He was so smooth a crook Lady Quorn feared he might kiss her. Was it just barely possible she had romantic ideas about him.

IT IS a disagreeable thing to say, and not one to say lightly but on a day not long ago a lady was accosted by a man in St. James Street.

It is true there was a slight haze, for it was a warm afternoon in late June, but on the whole the visibility was excellent. Therefore the man could not reasonably excuse himself on the ground that he had mistaken the lady for what used once to be pompously called a "fallen woman." On the contrary, only the rudest and most insensitive sort of man could have mistaken the lady in question for any other than a person of distinction.

Let us not speak of her dress, for anyone can buy the most exquisite frocks. Her figure was nice too. But it was her face, carriage and manner that permitted the student of the illustrated journals no doubt whatsoever as to the lady's breeding. Even as she strolled up St. James's Street past Lock's hat shop he could, as it were, see at her heels a traditional retinue of dogs, horses and servants.

The student of the illustrated journals would, in point of fact, have had no hesitation in recog-

Two great wars have come and gone since Michael Arlen first dazzled a "post-war" world with his brilliant satirical novel, THE GREEN HAT. *But we're sure you'll agree that this story has lost none of its luster.*

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nizing the Countess of Quorn and Beaumanoir.

Now though Lady Quorn was not more than thirty-five years old, she had added to the advantages of birth, beauty and one of the most distinguished marriages in England, the reputation of being the most irreproachable of gentlewomen, the most brilliant of platform speakers in the Conservative interest, and the most exclusive of hostesses. And she wore these superlatives with an air that was at once cool and charming.

So that when, as happened several times during the season, she and her husband stood at the head of the great staircase of Quorn House in Charles Street to receive their guests at a political or diplomatic reception, it was willingly conceded even by those the most critical of privilege that here, at last, in a society of casual origins and careless manners, was a pillar of tradition in all but her fair beauty, a Roman matron in all but her youth. In short, a classical ornament of the Tory party and a lady in the grand manner.

Imagine therefore the audacity of the man who, without any introduction whatsoever, would thrust his vulgar presence upon this lady. Nor did he seem in the least ashamed of himself. On the contrary, he was as off-hand as dammit. He neither took his hands out of his pockets nor his hat off his head. He was, in a word, extremely rude.

"I want to talk to you."

Lady Quorn, who was wondering whether it would be judicious to ask Terry Bruce down to Eves Park for the week-end with or without his charming wife, who bored her to death, was at that moment abreast of Brigg's cane and umbrella shop. And as, even when plunged into the deepest abstraction, her steady blue eyes always looked directly in front of her, she could not fail to note at once that a tall, lean, hawklike man had planted himself immediately in front of her.

Therefore, since it was unthinkable that she should move aside, she stopped. "*What* did you say?"

"I said," said the man, "that I wanted a few words with you. Now you say something."

Now Lady Quorn had a very steady eye with animals and Ambassadors. And behold, they quailed before her. But this person showed no signs whatsoever of quailing.

She saw before her a man of maybe thirty years of age, a tall athletic figure in a shabby suit of a good cut and wearing the honourable tie of her husband's old school. His brown felt hat which showed all the marks of continuous exposure to the elements over a period of years, was worn so that its turned-down brim obscured his left eyebrow. His face was long, narrow and tanned,

and his nose—which had originally been of the same generic order as her own patrician but decorative affair—had obviously been broken at some time, for it now showed a pronounced twist to one side.

He looked, in fact, a reckless sort of fellow with some pretensions to gentility. And his trousers, she noted with distaste as he stood planted in front of her with his jacket open and his hands in his pockets, were held up by a belt, a transatlantic practice she strongly disapproved of in urban surroundings.

"I think you must be mad."

Her eyes flicked him to one side as she took a step forward to continue her walk. She was arrested again by a really astounding happening. For the man had actually dared to prod her arm sharply. With his thumb.

Her anger was such that for a moment she felt quite dizzy. But she did not want to make a scene in St. James's Street—in the very heart, as they say in thrillers, of Clubland.

"Go," she said, "before I have to call a constable."

"Better hadn't, before you've heard what I have to say."

There was something so infuriating to one of her authority about his contemptuous assurance of manner, that, almost forgetting her lifelong habit of restraint with her inferiors, she thought for an instant of slapping his face.

"Do you know," she said acidly, "who I am?"

"I couldn't care less," said the hawklike man, "if you were Queen of the May. Now be a good girl, Lady Quorn, and try to be sensible for a change. I am not picking you up."

"Picking me up?" gasped Lady Quorn. *"Me?"*

"You remind me of my aunt," said the man coldly. "I am not picking you up because I think you are a nice-looking piece but because I want to talk business with you. To make myself a little clearer I shall add two names: Harry and Diana."

We have to respect Lady Quorn. Any other woman might very well have looked frightened, but her eyes expressed only a profound distaste for the company in which she found herself. Thus, gentlewomen, they tell us, once went to the guillotine.

"To think," she said, "that a man who was at the same school as my husband could be a cad."

"This is hardly the time," said the hawklike man, "in which to discuss the faults of the public school system. Would you rather I put my business to you here in St. James's Street, Lady Quorn, or shall we take a taxi and have a jolly ride around the Park?"

We have to go on handing it to Lady Quorn. Never in her life had she been talked to in this way. There was something so utterly detestable about this lean

and contemptuous stranger that she felt quite giddy with loathing. But there was something more than loathing, too. The man's manner made her—*her*—almost uncertain of herself. And, for perhaps the first time in her life, she felt a twinge of fear.

"Is this," she said, "blackmail?"

"Without gloves, Lady Quorn."

She measured him with cold eyes. "You may," she said, "call a taxi."

"Let me congratulate you," said the hawklike man, "You are a brave woman."

"I can see nothing brave," said Sheila Quorn, "in getting into a taxi with a worm."

II

In the taxi she sat very upright in her corner. Her heart was beating fast, but you never would have known it. The man, lounging in his corner with his arms crossed on his chest, had the audacity to put up his feet on one of the little seats. Twiddling the toe of one shoe thus prominently displayed—a fidgeting habit which reminded her of her husband in his most irritating moods—he said:

"You will be glad to hear, Lady Quorn, that I have not really had much experience in blackmailing people, for I am, by preference a burglar, as my father was before me, and my brother is now."

"And was," she asked with distaste, "your charming father caught?"

"No, he went bankrupt, a fate to which all bankers are liable, and one which I fear, my brother, who is a broker, will not escape for long. Now, I daresay, Lady Quorn, you are eager to know why you are being blackmailed. I shall tell you. You are one of the greatest ladies in England. You are admired and respected. To a great name you have added a high reputation as an arbitress of society and leader of fashion. You are a cherished ornament of the Tory Party. You are the idol of the respectable in society and the envy of those who have been found out. Am I right, Lady Quorn?"

She shivered a little, though the afternoon was quite close. "You are," she said, "the most horrible man I have ever met."

"On the contrary, madam, I am an idealist, as you will see. In seeking to improve the structure of society, it is my mission in life to look behind the surface of things. I seek, probe and pierce. I penetrate. And then, Lady Quorn, I unveil.

"Now this process has led to some startling and unbecoming results in your case. For what did I see when I unveiled you? Lady Quorn, I was shocked.

"For I saw that you were Dame Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde. Marble without, you were clay within. Behind your unassailable reputa-

tion, you live another life. Upheld on the outside by your high position, Lady Quorn, my researches led me to the conclusion that on your real character you wore all the earmarks of a pretty hot number. Madam, we English are snobs, but we are also Puritans. We revere our traditions, we fawn upon our betters—but God help them, madam, if they wear their coronets crooked in public places.

"You permit men to fall in love with you. That is not a crime, of course. But you invariably pick on other women's men and that is a dirty trick. Have I your attention? You are a very secret and a very discreet woman, Lady Quorn, so no one knows of your amorous adventures. Though no doubt some of your friends suspect something of the kind and admire you for getting away with it.

"Now it would be easy for me to share this admiration, for I am as partial as the next man to a beautiful woman, if you were not at heart cold and selfish, greedy and cruel. Correct me if I am wrong, Lady Quorn, as I may well be, for I am very sentimental. For you a man is an amusement for a few weeks or a few months. To you it doesn't matter that these wretched young men have broken off with their fiancees or wives because you have become the great passion of their lives.

"Let us face the facts. You are beautiful. You are passionate. You are famous. Thus you obsess men, for they are snobs and idiots. And since each one thinks he is the first and only man for love of whom you have been unfaithful to your husband, each has kept your name secret from his wife or his sweetheart. Besides, your reputation stands so very high as a pillar of the conventions and a president of committees that a young man who spoke of you with any familiarity would be cut down as a cad and a boaster.

"At a ball recently you took quite a fancy to a presentable young man called Harry Something. He is engaged to be married to a very pretty but not very wise young girl called Diana Something. Harry knows quite a bit about horses, so you asked him down to Eves Park to have a look at your hunters—not on a crowded week-end but on a weekday. He approved of your horses so thoroughly that he has not been able to give a thought to Diana since. In fact, I fancy he has already broken off the engagement.

"Now my expenses in making these momentous enquiries into your private life have been very considerable, Lady Quorn. But I am not a greedy man. So I am going to ask you to promise me to win my approval in the future by being a good girl.

"Let me give you a few pointers as to how to go about it. If, in the future, you have to have affairs at

all, Lady Quorn, you will choose only unattached men whose passion for you will bring no unhappiness to anyone but themselves. But if you continue to have secret meetings with young men like Harry, if you continue to ask young Bruce down to Eves Park without his wife, if in short you continue indulging in monkey business—it will cost you, Lady Quorn, one hundred pounds a crack.

"Let me make myself clear. For each and every time that I suspect you on good grounds of having given away to your lower nature with a married or engaged man, I shall charge you the sum of one hundred pounds. It is on record, after all, that married men have paid much more than that for what is, I believe, known as 'fun' or a 'nice change'—so why, in these days of equality for women, shouldn't you pay too?

"I need hardly say that if you don't I shall make it my business to see that the offended party, that is the wife or fiancee, is given a good hint or a series of good hints as to the identity of the intervener.

"In short, Lady Quorn, you continue indulging in monkey business with other people's property and I shall consider it my duty to throw a monkey-wrench into your reputation."

The taxi was now on the bridge over the Serpentine for the second time. Glancing at Lady Quorn's cold, severe and very lovely profile, the hawklike man might have thought she had not heard a word he had said if he had not also noted—rudely leaning forward to do so—the steely brightness of her blue eyes.

She said, "Please stop the taxi."

He did so.

She said: "And get out."

He did so. It was as though she had no knowledge whatsoever of his existence. He stood with one foot on the curb and the other on the running-board of the taxi, looking in at her. She never once glanced in his direction. And when she spoke, her lips scarcely moved.

"What is your name?"

"I am sometimes known as the Cavalier of the Streets." The man looked more than ever hawklike when he smiled. "And sometimes by much shorter names than that. I hope," he added, "that you will give the most careful consideration to what I have said."

She smiled very faintly, never glancing at him. "I shall not forget you," said Lady Quorn.

III

The man who was sometimes called by much shorter names than the Cavalier of the Streets was not surprised that night to find himself tapped on the shoulder. He had dined in a small restaurant in Greek Street and was walking down Shaftesbury Avenue. He had not gone far

when he realized that he was being followed by a beefy-looking man in a bowler hat. He therefore stopped on the curb at Piccadilly Circus to let the beefy man catch up with him. He stood as though bemused by the tender silhouette of Eros against the bright winking lights of the advertisements.

"I want," said the shoulder-tapper in his ear, "to talk to you, Wagstaffe."

"Mister Wagstaffe," said the hawklike man absently. "Look at that."

"Look at what?"

"The quiet and tender figure of Eros. He is the smallest and the quietest figure in sight, but he is more powerful than us all. Even the worst of us, from a plain-looking chap like me to a really handsome bloke like you, Inspector, have at one time or another been winged by him."

"That'll do," said the Inspector.

"Then you don't want me to tell you about my love-life?"

"No, I don't. I want to talk to you."

"If you clear your throat," said the hawklike man, "and take a deep breath, there's no reason why you shouldn't."

"I've got a message for you, my lad," said the Inspector.

"So this isn't a nab?"

"Expecting one, are you?"

"When I begin expecting intelligence from a detective, Bulrose, I'll take to solving cross-words for a living."

"You'll be in prison first, my lad. Want me to spill my message here or shall we go to some quiet place?"

"I have never," said the Cavalier of the Streets, "refused a drink in my life."

They went into a big crowded place nearby where many artists and journalists sat around tables drinking steins of beer in between talking about themselves and thinking about each other. Detective-Inspector Bulrose took a deep draught from his glass before addressing his companion.

"Now look here, Wagstaffe, you're in trouble," he said. "And you look like being in more trouble."

"Take a look at my figure, Bulrose."

"What's your figure got to do with it?"

"Only that it's trouble that keeps me thin. What about some more beer?"

"You just listen to me first," said Bulrose. "This is straight to you from Superintendent Crust. And *he* had it from someone higher up, maybe from the Commissioner himself, so you can see what trouble you are in. Superintendent says he's sick to death of you, and if he hears any more complaints about a bloke calling himself the Cavalier of the Streets, he's going to jug you. And he means it, Wagstaffe. If he can't pull you in for something you've done, he's going to frame you for

something you haven't. So behave yourself.

"Superintendent told me to say that in spite of knowing you're an incorrigible crook he's got quite a warm spot for you because of the help you've given us in some cases. But you've got to drop irritating and molesting people with this Cavalier of the Streets stuff. Why, only two weeks ago you had the cheek to black that chap Tyre-Temple's eye."

"Why not? I don't like him."

"And who stole Lady Fitzoda's ruby earrings from her bedroom while she was having a bath?"

"She will need more than an ordinary bath to wash away her sins."

"You'd better think of your own, Mister Wagstaffe. We've never caught you with the stuff yet, but you can't get away with it every time. Now you listen, my lad. Superintendent says that if you know what's good for you, you'll take a nice long rest at the seaside. I don't know what you've been up to today, but Superintendent said that the Commissioner was as mad as hell."

The hawklike man grinned. "I'll bet he was. I wonder what she told him."

"What's that?" said the Inspector eagerly. "Who's she?"

"You mind your own business, Bulrose. The Commissioner and I have got some of the same friends in the very highest society, and we naturally couldn't reveal social secrets to mere beer-drinkers like you."

"You'd talk the hind leg off a donkey," sighed the Inspector.

"Now you listen to me, Bulrose. Tell Superintendent Crust this from me and he can pass it on to the Commissioner if he wants to. I'll mind my own business, and they can mind theirs. Talking to me about ruby earrings as though I were a common thief!"

"We don't think you're a thief. We darn well know you're the only clever burglar in London."

"Is that so? Then if I'm foolish enough to do something you can gaol me for, I'm ready for gaol. But I don't like being ordered about, when all I'm doing is to behave like a decent citizen."

"Who?" gasped the Inspector. "You?"

"That's me," said the Cavalier of the Streets. "A decent citizen. A respectable subject of the King. Upright and incorruptible. An ally of the police. A friend of the poor. Which reminds me," he said, getting up from the table and taking something out of his pocket, "that here's your pocket-book, which you'll need to pay for the beer.

"You must have dropped it on the floor. Good night to you, Bulrose. Give my love to the Commissioner, and tell him to keep an eye on his pretty daughter. The aunt she went to dine with last Thursday night wore a silk hat and socks."

IV

Now it can be seen that in Lady Quorn and Beaumanoir beauty and resource were mingled in excellent measure. It was not to the Commissioner that she had made a complaint about the Cavalier of the Streets but to one of her several friends in the Cabinet, who had telephoned to the Home Secretary, who had telephoned to the Commissioner, who had talked to the Assistant-Commissioner, who had said a few sharp words to Superintendent Crust, who had passed them on to Inspector Bulrose.

Lady Quorn had not, of course, brought herself into the matter in any way, but had said that an American friend of hers, a young lady for whom she had the highest respect, had recently been troubled a great deal by a rascal calling himself the Cavalier of the Streets.

She had added that this young American lady, who belonged to one of the first families of Philadelphia, was far too shy to make any charge against the wretch, but that really something ought to be done to prevent distinguished foreigners in London from being molested by gangsters.

And Lady Quorn was of the opinion that, since so self-confident a rascal must in the past have frequently broken the law, the police should make every effort to protect the amenities of London by speedily proving him guilty of some past misdemeanor and putting him in a safe place where he could no longer annoy people like her charming American friend.

Her influential friend in the Cabinet, whose thoughts about Lady Quorn would have shocked the Archbishop of Canterbury, was able to assure Lady Quorn that everything possible would be done and that the young lady from Philadelphia would no longer be molested.

But Superintendent Crust did not take the same comforting view. In the course of the next few days the poor man was afflicted with several headaches, directly attributable to Mr. Wagstaffe, whom he called by names very much shorter than the Cavalier of the Streets.

But Crust knew his business, and he therefore assured the Commissioner, who assured the Home Secretary, who assured the influential member of the Cabinet, who reassured Lady Quorn, who presumably reassured the young lady from Philadelphia, that there was nothing further to worry about.

So about a week later Lady Quorn was disagreeably surprised when one afternoon her butler informed her that a gentleman had called to see her by appointment.

"I am," said her Ladyship, "not at home."

She was thinking very rapidly as the butler went towards the

door. Then a curious smile flickered over her lovely features, and what was curious about this smile was that it was at the same time childish, wicked and very attractive.

"I have changed my mind, Jolly. The gentleman has a twisted nose, has he not? Show him into the morning-room."

Quite ten minutes passed before she went downstairs. She used the telephone. She used the looking-glass. Now Lady Quorn was wearing a hat when Jolly announced the unwelcome visitor, but when she left her room, she was not wearing a hat. Her golden burnished hair, which has been described in the illustrated papers as often as the Quorn pearls, of which her throat was never without a rope, need call for no comment here. We can but praise it in passing, and we do so.

The man who called himself the Cavalier of the Streets was standing by the window looking out into Berkeley Square. His head uncovered, his face looked leaner and more hawklike than ever. His black hair was quite decidedly grey at the temples.

She was surprised to notice how little out of place he looked in her house, in spite of his casual clothes. She stood very still just within the doorway, a tall, slender, gracious woman. They stared at one another across the room for several seconds, and then his mouth twisted into a smile.

"You seem to be a very dangerous woman, Lady Quorn."

"And aren't you," she asked, "a very reckless man to come here?"

"After you put Scotland Yard on to me?"

"Oh, I don't like being defenceless."

They were standing in front of the empty fireplace. Her wide eyes were bright with laughter. He studied her thoughtfully, and the laughter in her eyes twitched at her mouth.

"With half an eye," he said pleasantly, "I can see that you are up to something, or you wouldn't be so amused."

"And can't you guess, Mr. Cavalier, what it is that is amusing me?"

"The only reason I can imagine for your added radiance—"

"Dear me, are you flattering me?"

"I am deploring you, Lady Quorn. The more desirable you appear, the more urgent I must be in preventing you from turning married men into giddy goats. Maybe what's amusing you is that you have a detective hidden somewhere in this room to catch me in the act of blackmailing you."

She laughed outright. And a dog outside in the hall, hearing her cool and pleasant laugh, barked frantically.

"And are you going to blackmail me?"

"Of course, Lady Quorn. And of course you know why."

She frowned. Fingering her pearls, she continued to frown. "I don't seem to remember anything of quite that nature since I last saw you."

"Try to think," he suggested.

"Dear me," she said, "it would be so impolite not to remember, wouldn't it?"

"What about," he asked, "the afternoon before last?"

"Oh," she said. "I remember! Terry?"

"Exactly."

"Dear me, of course. Yes, I had tea with him."

"Did you now?" said the Cavalier.

"Terry is such a nice boy, and he was all alone."

"Yes, I gathered that."

"I'm not sure," she said, "that I like the way you said that. He was lonely, you see, and he wanted to be cheered up."

"A cup of tea," he said, "can of course be very cheering."

"I have," she said severely, "the highest respect for Terry's wife."

"I am sure you have, Lady Quorn. It must be a great consolation for her."

"Now you are being sarcastic, and quite unjustifiably. If I can't have an innocent cup of tea with a friend, what can I have?"

"Of course," he said, "I can't be quite positive about my facts."

"Well, I should hope not."

"But there is such a thing, Lady Quorn, as circumstantial evidence. I am more or less in the same position as a divorce judge who has to decide whether a love-besotted man and an ardent woman alone together in surroundings that permit them a certain freedom of movement have taken advantage of those surroundings to do no more than have a cup of tea together."

"It is wrong," she said, "to think the worst of people."

"I am afraid, Lady Quorn, that it is no good appealing to the better instincts of a blackmailer."

"I wouldn't dream," she said seriously, "of appealing to your better instincts. It's only that I want fair play, and how can it be fair for me to give you a hundred pounds when my conscience is quite clear?"

"Your conscience?" he said. "A most unreliable witness, Lady Quorn."

"Well, all I know is," she said, "that I am an innocent woman."

"You mean, since I last saw you a week ago?"

"Of course," she said gravely, "only for the last week."

He looked thoughtful. Then, with no effort to conceal his disappointment, he sighed. "I suppose," he said, "you are quite sure?"

"Oh, quite. Of course, one forgets things sometimes. But about this week I am quite sure."

"Still," he said, "you will agree that your actions were decidedly misleading."

She sighed. "You are a very

suspicious man, aren't you?"

"A blackmailer has to be, Lady Quorn. And besides," he said severely, "it is written that the intention is as bad as the crime."

"That's exactly what I always tell my children. But," she added, "I'm bothered if I am going to pay a hundred pounds for nothing more than an intention. Dear me, if men had to do that, they'd be penniless in no time."

"Well," he said grudgingly, "I suppose that's only fair. Now will you tell me something, Lady Quorn, before I go?"

"But what in the world can I tell a man who already seems to know so much about me?"

"You were far from amused the last time I saw you. But this time you seem to have had great difficulty in not breaking out into girlish giggles throughout our interview. I wonder why?"

Her level blue eyes were so limpid with laughter that he could not help but smile in return. He took a step back as the very faint perfume from her burnished hair just brushed his nostrils.

"It's quite easy," she said, "to explain. Do you know, I am thirty-five years old, and you are the only person I have ever met in my life who knows me as I am. That is odd, you must agree, and funny too. I never dreamt there would be any man or woman in this world who would ever know the worst of me. You are the only person before whom I do not have to act. You have seen behind the cool facade, but you have seen nothing at all cool there, have you?

"And so you are the only man in the world who knows that I enjoy the body of love, just as a man does, and not its gentle tender spirit, as nice women are supposed to. That is why this interview has amused me so much. Dear me, how shocked I was at first that anyone had discovered my secret weaknesses. But now all I feel is relieved that I do at last know one person with whom I shall never have to act."

"I can see," he said, "that we are going to be great friends."

"Yes? It's so nice to be natural sometimes. You must come and see me again, Mr. Cavalier."

"But," he said, "it is not easy to believe that you can be acting quite *all* the time. Would these men become so obsessed with passion for having a cup of tea with you alone if acting was all you had to offer them?"

"Oh, you are being stupid. If I really let myself go as much as I should sometimes like—why, how shocked they would be! Didn't you know that an English lady must never enjoy herself too much. It wouldn't look nice. With foreigners, of course, who aren't really human, a little more latitude may be allowed. But, dear me, those boring Latin experts and their tricks!

"If I could write," she said, "I

would write such a book about the conceit, stupidity and sterling unattractiveness of men as would fill the convents of the world with girls and women clamouring to take the vow of chastity."

"Why, Lady Quorn, anyone would think you disliked men."

"It is the tragedy of women who love men, my friend, that they usually do dislike them. But how can one get round the *impasse?*"

"I am growing really quite sorry for you."

"Rightly, Mr. Cavalier. We must all feel sorry for those who try to put a shape to dreams. We dream of lovers equal to the gaieties and the ardours of love—and all we get is a man in search of a mother to protect him, a repentant fool, a jealous bully, or a pathetic child. I wish someone would tell me what flaw there is in men that makes them unworthy of straightforward gifts, of which love should be the first.

"But no, we cannot give them love and passion with both hands, frankly, we must corrupt our surrender with evasions and retreats, we must act or pretend or tease—else they will not cherish the gift. To think we have been lords of creation these millions of years and have evolved nothing more mature than man as an equal to a woman's love!"

The door opened, and she continued in a pleasantly sociable voice: "So you must come and see me again, won't you? I so enjoy your visits."

The butler said: "My lady, the Committee is waiting in the drawing-room."

"I shall be there in one moment."

Alone again, she said, coolly smiling, "Well, there is my real life. Sitting or presiding on committees. The rest—all we've been talking about—is nonsense. The leisured classes, they call us. Dear me, what fun life would be if we did not have to work harder at our pleasures than we do at our work."

She half extended her hand. "Good-bye, Mr. Cavalier." She was unsmiling, conventional.

"You have made it impossible for me," he said, "to blackmail you again—almost."

She regarded him so steadily that he blinked. But he did not look away. "Almost?" she said. "And what does that mean?"

"It means," he said, taking her cold hand, "that it is only my concern for the structure of society, which women like you menace, that will compel me to keep an eye on you."

Her bright wide eyes were unfathomable. Withdrawing her hand, she walked towards the door.

He stood watching her, a faint smile on his dark face. "Good-bye, Lady Quorn."

"I know," she said from the door, "that you are a man of

courage. But don't force me to send you to prison. The butler will show you out. Good-bye."

V

He had no sooner left the house than he was joined by Detective Inspector Bulrose. That excellent man made no secret of the facts that he had been waiting for him and that he was in an exceedingly bad temper.

"You're a prize juggins, my lad," he said testily. "Now, you come along with me."

The hawklike man, balancing himself on his heels, as though ready to waste time with the first person who offered him amusement, stared thoughtfully at the Inspector.

"What for, Bulrose?"

"Little innocent, aren't you?" Then suddenly, with a vehemence that flushed his face with crimson, he bawled: "Taxi!"

"What on earth is all this about, Bulrose?"

A taxi-driver, who had evidently just finished putting on a spare wheel at the corner of Hill Street, jumped enthusiastically into his cab and drove up beside them.

Belrose testily flung open the door. "This is a darned serious business, *Mister* Wagstaffe, so don't ask silly questions. Or ask the Superintendent. Jump in."

They were no farther than about eight yards from the door of Lady Quorn's house. Both men turned their backs to the taxi-driver as the door was flung open and the slim, elegant figure of a young lady came tripping down the stone steps.

"Now maybe," snapped Bulrose, "you'll know what we want you for."

"Will I indeed?" the other murmured, staring at the approaching figure.

"I suppose," snapped the Inspector, "you're going to say you've never seen *her* before?"

"But you must introduce me, Bulrose. She looks a nice piece."

"Where's your manners?" said the Inspector indignantly. "Calling a friend of Lady Quorn's a 'nice niece,' even though she is American."

The young lady, whose prettiness was of quite an uncommon order, as also was her slim elegance, came tripping towards them. She appeared, like many pretty young ladies, to be more interested in the contents of her vanity-bag, in which she was fumbling with her hand, than in her immediate surroundings.

And she would no doubt have collided into the two men if, when she was still a yard or two away from them, Bulrose had not taken a step forward.

"Beg pardon, miss, is this the man?" he asked.

"Sure," said the pretty young lady, looking coldly into the Cavalier's face. Her voice, which was at once soft and racy, would

have made the United States Ambassador homesick. "And if," she said, "you will examine his pockets, you'll certainly find the cheque I gave him a few minutes ago."

The Inspector looked with disgust at his prisoner. "And to think," he said, "I once thought you were almost an intelligent crook. Taking a cheque! Hand it over."

The Cavalier, a bewildered expression on his face, slowly extracted from the right side pocket of his jacket a folded cheque.

"Hand it over," the Inspector repeated. "I suppose you're going to say you've never seen *that* before."

"Oh, no," said the Cavalier. "But I'd like to look at it just once again."

Unfolding the cheque, he saw that it was made out to Michael Wagstaffe, Esq., for the sum of one hundred pounds, and was signed by Monica Gubbins. Then he handed it to the Inspector, who was about to put it in his pocket, when the pretty young lady cried:

"I'd certainly like it back."

"This is important evidence, miss. You'll get it back all right in due course."

The Cavalier was looking thoughtfully into the girl's face. He noticed she would not meet his eyes. "You are quite sure, Miss Gubbins," he said, "that you gave me this cheque in Lady Quorn's house?"

"Why, of course!" said the pretty young lady. "What was I to do when you were blackmailing me? And besides, Lady Quorn told me it was the best way out."

"I see," said the Cavalier.

"Miss Gubbins," said the Inspector, "I'm afraid I'll have to trouble you to come along with us and fill in the charge against this man."

"But," said the young lady, "I don't think I'm going to make any charge against him."

Bulrose, pushing back his bowler hat, mopped his flushed brow. "Ho!" he said bitterly.

The young lady's eyes now met the Cavalier's for the first time. Her lips, he fancied, were twitching faintly.

"Is the Inspector," she asked, "annoyed with me?"

"Oh, not annoyed," said the Cavalier. "Just give him time and he will bust nicely."

"'Course I'm annoyed," said Bulrose indignantly. "I'm sitting down in my office to a cup of tea when along comes an urgent message from Lady Quorn that this crook here has had the impudence to call at her house to see an American lady visiting her Ladyship and is no doubt going to try to blackmail her. And when I nab him with the check on him—she ain't going to make no charge."

"And what would happen to him," asked the pretty young lady, "if I did make it?"

"Two to three years," said Bulrose persuasively, "hard."

"Then," said Miss Gubbins, turning to the silent Cavalier, "you certainly have to thank Lady Quorn for being given another chance. I owe her so much for her kindness and hospitality that I just couldn't bring myself to refuse her anything at all. And when she asked me to let you off, as you were no doubt just a silly young man driven to crime from reading detective stories or seeing too many gangster pictures, I just had to say I would.

"Lady Quorn said maybe all you needed to come to your right senses again was a good square meal, and she gave me this ten-shilling note to give you, though of course you mustn't spend it all on going to the movies. But mind, now, this must be a lesson to you never to try blackmailing people again. Do you think, Inspector, that he will go straight after this?"

Bulrose, who appeared to be having some difficulty in controlling his facial muscles, managed to do no more than nod. And the pretty young lady, pressing the ten-shilling note into the Cavalier's numbed hand, walked swiftly away.

Then Detective-Inspector Bulrose really got down to business, so that butlers passing by in charge of lap-dogs envied him.

"Strike me pink!" he gasped.

Laughing with that profound relish which comes but too rarely in this vale of sorrow, he very nearly choked.

"I wouldn't have missed that," he gasped, "for all the beer in the world. Good as a play, to hear the Cavalier of the Streets being told off for being a bad boy from seeing too many gangster pictures. Which do you like best, Percy, the ones where the villain repents and goes straight for love of a nice pure girl? Superintendent Crust may almost forgive Lady Quorn getting you off when he hears that the biggest crook in London was tipped ten bob to get himself a decent meal."

The hawklike man, staring down at the ten-shilling note in his hand with a queer smile, said not a word. The taxi which Bulrose had hailed, was still with them.

"Jerwantme?" said the taxi-driver.

"What's that?" said Bulrose, wiping away his tears.

"Jerwantme," said the taxi-driver, "or not?"

The Inspector gave him a shilling with a friendly wave of the hand, told the Cavalier to be a good boy in future and see as few gangster films as possible, and, grinning broadly, strode away towards Vine Street to tell his friend, Inspector Mussel, the joke.

The taxi-driver who had been fumbling energetically with his gears while the Inspector was departing, now desisted, and looked

sympathetically at the silent figure on the curb.

"Poor old Waggers," he said. "But the main point is that we've got the stuff. It was pretty neat, the way you handed it to me just after I drove up."

The Cavalier, coming suddenly to life, twitched an eye-brow.

"And to think," he said, "I've lived to be called Percy by a flat-footed dick."

But there was a gleam in his dark eyes which might have given Inspector Bulrose food for thought rather than matter for laughter. Approaching so near the taxi-driver in his seat that there was no space between their arms, he whispered quickly:

"Hand it back, Pullman."

His obedient subordinate, doing his best to hide his curiosity by whistling, slipped a somewhat bulky handkerchief into the other's hand. The Cavalier, his back to the house behind him, slipped it into his breast pocket.

"Put the car away," he said, "and come to the flat about six. And for pity's sake, get yourself a decent shave."

As the taxi-driver indignantly changed gears he saw, to his astonishment, his chief mounting the broad steps to Lady Quorn's house.

VI

"I wondered," said Lady Quorn, "if you would come back."

"I can only hope you have missed me. I have," he said, "a bone to pick with you, Lady Quorn."

"Oh, what ingratitude! And after the trouble I went to persuading Miss Gubbins to make no charge against you for the horrible crime of blackmail."

"I don't know how," he said, "to thank you—or forgive you. For entirely owing to you, I have been called Percy by a policeman."

"If you wish," she said, "I will write to the Commissioner and complain on your behalf."

"Are you positive," he said, "that you haven't any complaints to make on your own? Better look in the mirror, Lady Quorn."

Her level eyes rested on him for a long second before she turned to the looking-glass over the fireplace. "I see," she murmured, her reflection in the mirror looking gravely at him.

He was thoughtfully fingering the rope of pearls he had extracted from the handkerchief the taxi-driver had returned to him. He held them out to her. She made no movement, her shoulder to him, still gazing at him in the mirror.

"So all that blackmail business," she said, "was just so much nonsense—an excuse to get into my house?"

"Let us call it a background. It was quite sincere. I disapproved of you, Lady Quorn, and I told

you why. I only steal from people I disapprove of."

"And give the proceeds to charity?"

"Well, not quite. But I do, I fancy, give as much as any other Christian. You see how modest I am?"

"And why are you returning my pearls?"

"I told you," he said, "that I only stole from people I disapproved of."

"And you have ceased to disapprove?"

"Oh, no. But I disapprove of your husband even more for being, as he must be, such an unattractive, useless and silly man as not to be able to keep the affections of a woman like Sheila Quorn."

"I should like to think, then, that you are returning the pearls because you like me?"

"Yes. And also," he said, "because they are false. It was clever of you," he added, absently fingering the pearls, "to slip that check into the pocket of an accomplished thief. My vanity is quite concerned, Lady Quorn. How did you do it?"

"Dear me, Cavalier, at one moment you were so near to me that I feared you were about to kiss me."

"And then you would have slapped my face?"

"Oh, it is only frightened women who make small points."

He let the pearls drop with a small crash on to the table, and walked towards the door.

"Cavalier," she said, "would you have returned the pearls if they had been real?"

"I am afraid so," he said from the door. "Is it necessary for me to tell you why? Good-bye, Lady Quorn. But should your husband ever *miss* his pearl studs, you will know that my disapproval of a complaisant husband has reached its limit."

His hand was on the door-knob.

"My friend," she said, "I have just realized that I know so little about you. Are you, by any chance, engaged or married?"

As he turned from the door he saw she was pressing the bell. "I am ringing," she said, "for tea."

mc question's murder trail

by . . . Ernest Haycox

The Sheriff knew the hunted man was a murderer. So he lied a bit and made him a monster. But the ample folds of justice covered it.

WHEN MATT MCQUESTION came through the throat of the low pass and paused to look down at the ranch below he already had made a thorough and unobserved survey of the surrounding hills. And there was in him a rising belief that the man he wanted—a legal John Doe whose face he never had seen—was at present sheltered someplace on that ranch.

Proceeding down the slope, Matt McQuestion observed all signs with an old hunter's sure instinct for danger. A sodden, cloud-congested sky lent an uneasy dimness to the day, and the wind ripped wildly against the trees, creating the sound and fury of some vast cataract pouring into a chasm. Faintly through this roar there sounded the beating of the ranch triangle, announcing noon and the midday meal. A pair of riders cantered homeward along an opposite slope.

The house and outbuildings of the ranch seemed to crouch beneath the tempest, and in the hillside corral a bunch of horses stood passively dejected, backs humped, tails driven between their legs. As McQuestion drew along-

When a top-flight Western story writer invades the mystery story field you can be sure his characters will not lack vitality. A frequent contributor to COLLIER'S *and* THE SATURDAY EVENING POST, *Ernest Haycox has not only blazed a new trail here—he has scored a triple bull's eye!*

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side the house, a stout and florid man emerged onto the porch.

"Light an' come in!" he bellowed. "Judas, what a day to ride. Lonny, come take this horse to the barn!"

But the rider kept his place in the saddle until he had observed the necessary amenities. "My name," said he, "is Matt McQuestion, sheriff of the county."

"Heard of you and mighty pleased to have you drum your knuckles against my door!" shouted the ranchman. "I'm French Broadrick! You're just in time to eat! Get down, sir, get down! We're too condemned polite for good health! Lonny, take the horse!"

McQuestion dismounted, surrendered his pony to the puncher who appeared from around the house, and joined the rancher on the porch. They entered the house. Beside the bright maw of a fireplace the law officer stripped off slicker and hat while Broadrick kicked the door shut.

The boom of the storm faded to an endless muttering groan about the eaves. A table lamp thrust lanes of topaz light against false shadows, and from some other part of the house there came a clatter of dishes.

Broadrick rubbed his hands in front of him with a gusty, growling satisfaction. Though there was now no need to raise his voice against the storm, it blasted loud into the silence.

"Mighty pleased to have you as a guest, Sheriff. Our trails have crossed but this is my first pleasure of meetin' you in the flesh. Right ahead of you, sir, is the dinin' room door."

The sheriff went through the door and paused as he became the target of a sudden scrutiny from eight men and a girl seated around the table. As he stood there he seemed very little like a law officer who had spent the major part of his life in an exceedingly rough country.

Dressed in neat black, he looked more like a genteel clerk than a lawman. Though tall, there was a worn fragility about him and the slight stoop of age. His wrists were thin, the hollows of his neck and cheek deeply accented, and a gaunt Adam's apple terminated a series of thoughtful features rendered almost melancholy by the presence of a drooping, silver-streaked mustache. A pair of mild blue eyes met the general stare diffidently, then lowered to the table, without seeming to have observed much.

"My crew," said Broadrick, "and my daughter, Marybelle. Boys, the Sheriff. Be good now, blast you. Sheriff, the chair at my right."

McQuestion bowed slightly and sat down. He was aware of the tension that leaped into the men at the table when his profession was mentioned.

The girl, sitting opposite him,

smiled. She had a candid, boyish face and there was a flash of spirit in her that at once commanded McQuestion's instant response. She was no more than twenty, unmarked as yet by any sadness.

Pale gold hair fell softly about her fair temples and in the firm, fresh lines of her shoulder and breast was the hint of a vital but as yet untouched energy.

When she spoke there was warmth and friendliness in her voice. "Who could be bad enough to bring you out in weather like this, Sheriff?"

"Outlaws," said the sheriff, smiling at her, "always pick poor weather."

"You're on business?" asked French Broadrick. "What outlaw is on the loose now?"

McQuestion was aware of the quiet around the table. And because he was by inclination a poker player on an errand, requiring the finesse of poker strategy, he let his words fall distinctly into the calm.

"I'm lookin' for a man who passed this way about a week ago, a man wearin' butternut britches and ridin' a stockin'-legged strawberry roan."

The deep silence held. There was no reaction from the men around the table as Matt McQuestion's mild glance ranged over them.

French Broadrick offered a platter of beef to the sheriff, still casually jovial. "What crime?"

"Murder," said the sheriff bluntly.

"Murder?" grunted Broadrick, his easy humor vanishing. "Murder, you say?" His big shoulders hunched. "Or justifiable homicide? There's a difference between them, Sheriff."

"You're right, sir," McQuestion said. "There's a difference." Then he turned his attention to the food.

He had no intention of revealing his hand further. His man was on the ranch; more, his man was within this room. The knowledge came not from any overt signal or from the faces of the punchers who sat dull and stiff around him. It came from Marybelle Broadrick.

At the word *murder* she had flinched visibly and her smile had vanished. She stared now at McQuestion, her young face pale, rigidly still, a mutely agitated question in her widening eyes. But this, too, was betrayal and she looked into her plate, hands withdrawn from the table.

French Broadrick spoke again, ruddy cheeks broken by concentric scowling lines. "This man you're after—was his crime murder or justifiable homicide, Sheriff?"

"Might be either," replied McQuestion, lying gravely. The girl's eyes lifted and he saw hope replace bewilderment.

"What's his name?" pressed Broadrick.

"On the warrant it appears as John Doe."

"You don't know him?" Broadrick looked surprised.

"Never met the man. I'm on a blind chase, after a stranger. But the circumstantial evidence against him is mighty strong, and there's a couple men who saw him from a distance when he was on the run."

"How in thunder do you expect to find him?" Broadrick wanted to know.

"One item is the horse."

"Which he could swap for another," countered Broadrick.

"And the butternut pants," mused McQuestion.

"He's probably thrown them away," said Broadrick. "What's left? Nothing, it seems to me. I'd hate to start after a man on information as thin as that."

"One detail yet to mention," said the Sheriff in a slowly casual manner that tightened the interest around him. "When we got to the scene there was the dead man who couldn't tell us anything. No witnesses and no messages. But a few feet from this dead man there was a dribble of blood along the rocks. No rain that day.

"The dribble went across the rocks, onto some sand and as far as some hoof-prints. The hoof-prints led this way. You see? The dead man got in his shot before he fell, and wherever this John Doe may be, he's packin' a bullet hole in him."

There was a brief, awkward silence. The girl ventured another straight, brief glance at Matt McQuestion, and he saw a stiffening antagonism in her now. She was partisan by nature and her loyalty once fixed, would never waver. That he could tell by looking at her. If she loved a man she would close her eyes and go unflinchingly the whole distance, to hell or to heaven.

So, at least, the sheriff guessed. And he felt a profound admiration for her.

French Broadrick cleared his throat, staring above the heads of his men. "Well, that's enough to hook him up with the shootin'. But if nobody saw this affair, then nobody knows what brought it about or the justice of it. And you ain't caught your man yet, Sheriff."

"The trail," repeated McQuestion quietly, "leads this way."

He stirred his coffee, all the while exploring the faces across the table. One by one he discarded each puncher as the man he sought. It took a toughness of fiber, a certain mental make-up to run with the wild bunch. This these men lacked. Most of these fellows were middle-aged, plainly old retainers and lacking the earmarks of a guntoter.

But a pair of younger men at the foot of the table interested him. One was a tall, slim character with deep red hair and a remarkably rippling coordination of

muscle and nerve that expressed itself in each restless shift of his body. The other sat stolidly silent, dark and rugged and a fighter in every observable fiber. As McQuestion considered these two, French Broadrick brought the dinner to a curt close.

"We'll go on with the work in the sheds this afternoon," he said.

Rising with the rest, McQuestion stood as the crew filed out of a dining-room, and into the rain-soaked yard. The red-haired man walked slowly, and as he went down the steps there was a slight stiffening of his body that did not escape the Sheriff. The more rugged man brought up the rear, and he looked back, caught the Sheriff's glance and closed the door swiftly behind him.

McQuestion preceded his host into the living-room and turned his back to the cheerful flames in the fireplace. The girl had disappeared. Broadrick moved aimlessly about the room, his mind obviously struggling with a difficult thought. Presently he came to a stop in front of the Sheriff.

"You've told mighty little of the story," he said bluntly. "What's the rest of it?"

The blue eyes of the Sheriff narrowed against the firelight. Still holding his place, he answered Broadrick. "In my life I've frequently had the disposition of some fellow's future at my command. It's no easy thing to play the part of judge and I'll not say I always decided right. It weighs on me sometimes—the mistakes I've made. I'm slower to act than I used to be. Any lawman can make an arrest. The difficult thing is to know when *not* to."

Broadrick nodded agreement, said, "If this John Doe's what you say, where's the problem?"

"I've got a hunch he's not the only one to consider now," said the Sheriff.

There was a quickening light in French Broadrick's eyes, a sudden tightening of his face muscles. "I understand how you got your reputation. You're a lean old wolf, McQuestion."

McQuestion nodded, knowing then that Broadrick grasped the situation. He knew too, that whatever the final issue, Broadrick would never reveal the hunted man. It was one of the oldest laws of the range, sanctuary of a sort. If there was trouble, Broadrick was prepared to settle it in his own way, within the confines of his ranch.

McQuestion reached for his slicker and hat. "I'll be lookin' after my horse," he said and headed for the door.

When he stepped out into the sheeting, tempestuous rain he heard the girl's voice rise suddenly troubled and high-pitched, from inside the house, calling her father.

The barn was straight ahead; left of it stood the bunkhouse. To the right of the barn and past the

outlying corrals he could see the hillside compound where the loose stock was held.

His attention settled on that area but the dull gloom of the day defeated his search for a stocking-legged strawberry at that distance. He entered the gray alley of the stable, found a piece of clean burlap and proceeded to rub down his pony.

His chore done, he left the barn and walked toward the bunkhouse, through the windows of which glimmered a fogged, crystal lamplight. Opening the door with a preliminary knock, he went into quarters similar to a thousand others throughout the west.

A rugged-looking young man reared up from one of the lower bunks, said gravely, "Have a chair, Sheriff."

"Thanks. I'll stand," McQuestion said quietly. "Been sittin' in leather all day long."

"And a poor day to travel," said the puncher in the manner of a man making talk to be agreeable.

"Can't pick and choose," replied the Sheriff. He let his glance stray as he talked. All the lower bunks were filled, but only one upper. That was occupied by the red-head who had sat at the end of the dining table. He lay sprawled on his back, a cigarette drooping from his lip. Without looking at the sheriff he spoke with a lazy, sardonic drawl.

"Outlaws should be more considerate of the constituted authorities."

"Well, Red," said the Sheriff, "as long as they're considerate enough to leave tracks behind I'm not carin' about the weather."

"Did this one?" queried Red, making no comment on the Sheriff's giving him a nickname.

"Yes."

"Mighty careless of him," mused Red. "Must of been a greenhorn."

"I'll know more about that later," said McQuestion as silence again descended upon the room —the silence of men guarding their tongues.

"Time," said the rugged one, "to get back on the job."

He opened the door, and left the bunkhouse. The other followed slowly. The red-head put his feet over the edge of the bunk frame and eased himself carefully to the floor, knees springing when he landed. For a moment he faced the sheriff, grinning out of a wide, thin mouth. He was not handsome. The conformation of his face was too angular, his green eyes set at too crooked a slant. But his was a personality that would not be overlooked, a positive one, at once restless, dominating, sure of itself. McQuestion noted the hard, unruffled competence behind that grin, the lurking mockery.

"Was he a bad man at heart, Sheriff? Real bad?" The red-head's voice was soft and taunting.

"I'm wonderin', Red," said the Sheriff. "And I hope to find out."

Red turned then and left the bunkhouse, a shadow of stiffness in his gait. McQuestion wheeled slowly where he stood, taking in once more every detail of the room.

He was positive now that he knew the identity of John Doe. "It's Red, for sure," he muttered.

But, strangely enough, the more or less definite end of his quest left him without any elation, without the thrill that usually came with a capture.

He paused in the open doorway of the bunkhouse, considering his next move. His eyes traveled toward the ranch house. On a side porch of the house Marybelle Broadrick stood beside Red, looking up at him and talking with swift gestures of her hands. Red was shaking his head; one hand touched the girl's shoulder in a manner that seemed to the Sheriff possessive and confident.

The girl swayed back slightly from his touch and Red, turning, left the porch, crossed the yard to an open shed.

McQuestion left the bunkhouse, ambled likewise to the shed and loitered there. Another day didn't matter. He liked to put human values first, to consider charity even above justice.

So, idling in the shed he watched the men working with a patient interest.

In a kind of orderly confusion they were overhauling the ranch gear. At the forge one of the punchers bent red-hot iron over the anvil with heavy, ringing strokes of his hammer. Another filed mower blades. The carpenter of the outfit cut a board, saw whining above the anvil echoes.

Meanwhile, the foreman had attacked a heavier chore. Pressing his back to a wagon frame he began to lift, all his broad muscles swelling with the pressure.

A helper stood by, attempting to slide a jack beneath the rising axle; but the weight was unwieldy and difficult to manage. Releasing his grip, the foreman looked about for an unoccupied hand. He saw the red-head slouching indolently at the forge. The sheriff saw the level features of the rugged one tighten, a speculative look enter the cold eyes. But after a moment he seemed to change his mind, and called to another, "Bill, give me a hand here."

The red-head seemed aware of the fact that he had been passed by. The tenseness of his face relaxed and with a grin he spoke to the crew generally. "The mighty muscles of our straw boss seem to grow weary."

"But not my tongue," replied the foreman, softly.

"Meanin' mine wags too much, uh?" murmured Red, his grin widening. "Old son, you ought to know by now that muscle is cheap and brain rare. Anybody can

sweat, but blamed few can scheme well."

The foreman stood still, his hard blue eyes on Red. "That may be," he drawled. "But I sometimes wonder where the schemin' will end. Consider it," he added gently, "an idle query."

McQuestion left the shed and walked to the house, head bent against the rain, his blue eyes thoughtful . . . The foreman could have asked Red to put a shoulder against the wagon. He could have made Red suffer, with that game leg, and let me catch on to the fact Red packed an injury. But he didn't because he's a dead sound sport. And how does Red pay back the compliment? By goadin' the foreman. He knows he's safe on these premises so he uses his sharp tongue to hurt.

Reckless and a mite of a fool, that's Red, he thought. There's one crooked play to his credit, but the chance is still open to him to go straight. If he gets that chance now will he walk a straight trail in the future? Hard to tell how this girl, if he got her, would affect him.

She might keep him honest. But if she failed, Red might bring her to his own sad level. The Sheriff shook his head, trouble in his eyes. It was a hard choice he had to make . . .

The living-room of the ranch house, when he reached it, was empty. Saddle-weary, McQuestion sank into a leather armchair, fell into a doze. When he woke the room was dark and the roar of the storm had increased. He could hear voices from the front porch, voices suppressed, but near enough for him to hear. The girl was talking.

"I know you wouldn't give him away. You're not that kind, Lee. I only asked you what you think of him, now that the Sheriff has told us his story."

"Why ask me?" The foreman's voice was blunt and angry. "What difference does it make to you what I think about him? I'm not his keeper, and not yours."

"Lee, what concerns me means nothing to you? Look at me and say that?"

"One of us is a fool, Marybelle. I can look at you and say this much! I have played faithful Rover to you for a long time. I seemed to be getting along fine until *he* came along." He paused. Then he said, "If you like him, it's your business. And you brought this up. Don't expect *me* to tattle on him."

The girl said, "I'm not fickle, Lee. I like him, yes—but I want to know what *men* think of him. Lee, can't you understand that a girl doubts her heart sometimes?"

The foreman didn't reply immediately. When he did, his voice was tight. "Better make up your mind. I'm not stayin' on the ranch if he does. We don't mix."

There was a prolonged silence. It was broken at last by the girl.

"I never knew you cared that much, Lee." Her voice was gentle, soft. "You have never spoken, Lee."

"Good lord, Marybelle, where's your eyes?" he burst out.

"Looking for something they didn't find—until this minute, Lee," she said.

They moved away then and their voices became indistinct, faded. McQuestion looked at his watch and found it was after three. Rising, he picked up his hat and walked out onto the porch. So the foreman was top man with the girl until Red came . . . The girl was taken by the handsome manners of the new man . . . He was young, dashing, daring . . . But she wasn't completely gone on him—not yet.

He came to an abrupt halt. Two men filed across the yard dragging a wagon tongue between them. One of them was the red-head. He was now limping obviously.

Suddenly, the red-head slipped to his knees, dropped the wagon tongue. He turned to the man beside him, glaring angrily, his young face twisted with rage, the crimson showing under the tan of his skin. His mouth framed a violent word. Deliberately, he slapped the other man across the mouth. Then he turned and strode away.

McQuestion, standing in the shadow of the porch, shook his head sadly.

"No. He'll never change," he said, softly to himself. "He'd destroy the girl, break her. What good's a bright mind if the heart's rotten?"

French Broadrick came around the corner of the house, water cascading down his slicker. McQuestion joined the rancher as he entered the house. Marybelle came in from the kitchen, slim and graceful against the lamplight. Matt McQuestion faced them in front of the fireplace. "Thank you for your hospitality. You were both mighty kind. Now I'll be ridin', I guess. He moved toward his slicker, hanging on the tree beside the front door.

"In this weather?" roared Broadrick. "Wait it out. Till mornin' anyhow."

"Spent too much time on a cold trail already," said McQuestion, "and I oughta be back in Sun Ford right now, tendin' more urgent business. I'm grateful to you both." He smiled at the girl and thrust out a lean, brown hand to the rancher.

Broadrick's round face was thoughtful as he returned the Sheriff's hand grip.

"What's your verdict, Sheriff?" he asked abruptly.

Marybelle rested silent in the background.

"You asked me if it was justifiable homicide or murder," drawled the Sheriff. "I'll tell you the story and you can decide for yourself. This John Doe was out in the hills tamperin' with some-

body else's beef. A line rider heaves over the rim, catches him. John Doe does a natural thing—he slings lead. He takes a bullet in reply but his first shot puts the line rider in the dirt.

"The line rider lies there, alive, but helpless. John Doe does what only a born killer would do. He puts a second bullet into the back of the man's skull, shootin' close up. Personally, I consider that murder . . . I bid you good day."

The girl's hands were fists, with the knuckles showing white. McQuestion bowed to her and moved toward the door, Broadrick following. Together they walked to the barn. The silence between them was unbroken as McQuestion saddled. When the Sheriff was mounted and turned to leave the barn, Broadrick broke the long silence.

"You're a wolf, a gray old wolf. I don't know what's in your mind but whatever you do, I'll feel it's right. And my next chore is to get your picture and hang it on my wall. So long, and the Lord bless you."

They eyed each other for a moment. Then McQuestion rode into the yard, lifting a hand in final farewell.

The foreman was at that minute leaving the shed and McQuestion swerved his horse to intercept the man. The rugged puncher said, "Leavin' us, Sheriff?"

McQuestion nodded.

"My boy," he said, "forty-one years ago I lost a girl because I was mighty proud and unbending. Along came another man who had the grace and nerve to speak his piece. And I've been a little lonesome lobo ever since. Take it from me, son—you've got to tell the ladies what they want to hear. Any man that doesn't is a fool. Adios."

Well away from the house, he turned from his due northern course, urged his horse to a steady run and cut about the little valley, riding through heavy timber and across rugged defiles.

Half an hour later he arrived at a road coursing to the south, the exit from Broadrick's ranch as well as the end of the county. There a few rods above the road, stood a tumbled confusion of rocks. He tethered his horse behind the rock mound, dismounted and squatted down beside the road.

"Man never knows," he grumbled, "whether his monkeyin' with the course of fated events is wise or not. Here I go, monkeyin' around again . . ."

He raised his rifle, trained it on a figure suddenly around a bend. The rider was on the Broadrick ranch. The rider came fifty yards closer and he saw it was Red, who rode slackly on a stocking-legged strawberry horse. McQuestion turned the safety on his rifle and cast a sharp, thin order through the wind.

"Hands up—and sudden!"

Red reined in, made a confused move toward his gun, saw no target, and reached for the leaking heavens.

"Get down, put your back to me—lift your gun gently and throw it!" The Sheriff spoke deliberately, clearly.

Again Red obeyed. McQuestion rose and walked toward him. The red-head looked over his shoulder, recognized the sheriff. The reckless face was tight drawn and savage looking.

"How'd you figger it, McQuestion?" he said abruptly.

McQuestion paused. His clear blue eyes peered through the rain between hat brim and slicker collar.

"I've hunted men for thirty years, Red. By now I know a little about human nature. Broadrick wouldn't betray you. But after what I told him I figured he'd not tolerate you another minute on the ranch. He'd give you your horse and tell you to lope. I knew you'd travel south because that's out of the county and because you saw me head north when I left the ranch house."

The red-head shook with fury; the blaze in his eyes grew half-crazed. "Damn you, McQuestion! You lied about me! I never put a second shot in that line rider's skull! *That's* what stuck in Broadrick's craw! He believed you and he couldn't stand me for that! And the girl—she stared at me like I was a monster! I'll kill you for that lie—before God I will!"

"Yeah," said the Sheriff. "I lied that much. But I gave you an even break—up until you belted that puncher in the face when you twisted your bad leg while you two was pullin' that wagon. Then I knew what you'd do to the girl if you ever got her. A man who'll take his hurt out on an innocent bystander don't deserve to be treated honest. There's a better man left behind to take care of Marybelle. So I lied. But, I think the ample folds of justice will cover it . . . Say adios to this land, Red. Say adios. You'll see it no more."

roll 'em over gently

by . . . Jim Kjelgaard

It was simply a getaway car to Dutch, fast and dependable. How was he to know its owner had brushed shoulders with death?

STANDING ON THE shoulder of the highway, Dutch Bender trained his cold blue eyes on the oncoming car and decided that it was what he wanted. He bent forward, and pressing one hand to his side, he stepped into the road. He waited for the car to draw near before raising a feeble hand.

He heard the brakes squeal and noted that the driver was the car's only occupant. The car stopped directly in front of him, and the driver rolled the window down.

"What's the matter here?" he called out. "Need help?"

"I wonder if you could get me to the hospital at the next town?" Dutch mumbled. "I feel pretty bad. When the cramps hit me I can't straighten up. My car's out of commission, so I walked down to the highway to try to catch a ride."

The driver opened the door, holding the hinged seat forward. "Climb in the back, and lie down on the seat," he invited. "Think it's appendicitis?"

"I don't know," Dutch said. "It came on sudden-like."

He climbed in, and let himself down on the seat as the car

The brilliant flashes of characterization in Jim Kjelgaard's animal tales for which he is justly renowned, have a startling way of transferring themselves to the men and women of his detective stories. Dutch Bender might well have been a crocodile, wily and vicious, and—but we won't spoil your reading pleasure by revealing more about this inimitable yarn.

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started. This was a sweet little model. New, fast, inconspicuous. He knew how to pick 'em, all right. And who would expect to find Dutch Bender rolling along the Lafayette Highway in a job like this when, after sticking up that store and killing its cashier, he was supposed to be heading East?

"Had the pain long?" asked the driver, watching his passenger solicitously in the rear vision mirror.

"No. As I said—it came on sudden."

"Make yourself as comfortable as you can," the driver advised. "Kingston is only thirty miles. I'm on my way to the fair grounds on Center Street. I'll get you to the hospital in twenty-five minutes."

They were approaching a hilly section, and the first sign warning of dangerous curves appeared. The car was going fast. Dutch took a snub-nosed automatic pistol from his pocket and pressed it against the driver's back. He had no intention of delaying any longer. The sooner he got behind the wheel, the better he'd like it.

"Turn off at the next side road!" he said, his voice a steely rasp.

The driver sat silently for a second. Then he said, "So that's the way it is," and stepped on the gas.

Dutch felt the car gather speed, and his fingers tightened on the gun. "You heard what I said!" he snapped. "Turn off at the next side road. I've used this gun before, so don't try any tricks."

They were taking the first curve at a speed which swung his body hard over towards the outside of the seat. A leaping fire of anger heated the streak of viciousness in his eyes.

"I'll let you have it," he warned. "I'll drill you clean through."

"Go ahead!" the driver yelled back. "You'll kill yourself doing it."

The next curve was sharper, and the car took it at increasing speed. Dutch Bender leaned back and braced both feet against the front seat. Maybe that driver thought he'd picked up an addle-headed school kid, somebody that seventy-five miles an hour could scare. He'd discover his mistake quickly enough.

This road couldn't be *all* curves. They were bound to come to a straightaway, and it wouldn't take a split second to plug the smart guy between the shoulders, climb over in the front seat and grab the wheel. Anybody who'd driven as many getaway cars as Dutch Bender had could do that, and do it quick.

Taking each curve at a crazy speed, the car rocked along two miles more before Dutch saw his chance. Just ahead the road swung into nearly a mile of straight running. Dutch poised the gun.

He would shoot the instant they rounded the curve.

But instead of taking the curve, the car slowed to an incredible thirty-five miles, and swung into a wide, dirt road coming in from the right.

The driver said wearily: "You win. The car's yours."

Dutch rose triumphantly and put one leg over the front seat. His eyes strayed to the driver's lap, and widened in swift startlement. The man at the wheel had somehow managed to strap himself into the seat.

Dutch took his eyes off the driver for an instant, glancing swiftly up the dirt road. It was a country road, lined with farms, and it would be a good place to carry out the grim purpose he had in mind. As soon as they came to a lonely stretch where there wasn't any farms he'd blast down the smart guy, and leave him in the ditch. Dutch raised his other leg, prepared to slide down beside the driver.

Instantly the car shot sideways towards a grass-grown embankment, and the driver jammed the brake down—hard. Dutch tried to catch himself, but the car went careening wildly over on its side, and his head banged against the steel top. He jerked forward, dimly but horribly aware that the car had turned completely over and was now upright again in the meadow. . . .

Dutch blacked out for a moment. When he came to he was strapped securely in the front seat beside the driver. The car was back on smooth concrete again, gliding at a leisurely pace toward Kingston. Dutch's aching head had cleared enough so that he could distinguish the houses and street signs when they entered the little town.

"You wanted to get to the hospital," the man at the wheel said. "Well—you'll get there. But we'll stop at the police station first."

He slowed down to ten miles an hour as they approached a big billboard. "Take a look at it," the driver urged quietly. "Take a good, long look!"

On the billboard Dutch saw the likeness of the man beside him, and a picture of a car rolling over in a cloud of furiously whirling dust. He read: SEE LUCKY TRENTON, DAREDEVIL DRIVER DEMONSTRATE THE SAFETY OF ALL-STEEL BODIES—AT THE FAIR GROUNDS.

the little things

by . . . Ray Cummings

It's the little things that add up—when murder comes ungently tapping at your chamber door!

THE NIGHT was clear and still and the mountain lake gleamed brightly in the moonlight as George Parton paddled swiftly for the hotel dock. He was careful to avoid being seen as he slid the canoe up the incline-landing. He left it there, and carried the single paddle with him up the shadowed little path to the hotel. No one observed him as he darted into the hotel, and made his way to the room of his Uncle, William Johnson.

Still carrying the paddle, he entered the room through an unlocked door, and closed it swiftly and quietly after him.

It was a luxurious little ground-floor suite, consisting of a foyer, a small, handsome living room, bedroom and bath. It was unlighted now, with only the silvery glow visible through the windows. Parton knew that his Uncle wouldn't be home yet. He had gone with friends to the movies in town, leaving word that he would drive back and arrive about midnight.

Parton's heart was pounding as he laid the paddle on a couch.

Mention this author's name to almost anyone, you'll as likely as not be told: "Ray Cummings! Of course. He wrote THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM." *It takes real writing ability to turn out a popular magazine story that will maintain its reader appeal for thirty years. Fewer people realize that Mr. Cummings is just as skillful a detective story writer, with an enviable reputation in a domain quite as exacting as the fantasy field.*

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The corridor door was the only entrance to the little suite. Parton fixed the spring lock so that it would remain fastened on the inside. The big, ornate silver paperknife lay on the desk. Quietly, methodically, Parton wrapped its handle in a handkerchief. Then, knife in hand, he stood in the starlit dimness of the foyer by the door, waiting.

Queer, how Parton's heart pounded! He had planned it all so carefully. It had to be done. His quarrel with his Uncle that very afternoon had made swift, remorseless action necessary. Young Parton suddenly had found himself in a nasty jam. William Johnson was a wealthy bachelor and he was dickering now to buy this big hotel.

Parton had figured of course, that his Uncle would make him the Hotel Manager at an impressive salary. He had told Marjorie all about it. He'd take her out of the chorus, marry her and bring here here as mistress of this big layout. It had sounded grand to Marjorie. Their plans had all been settled.

But William Johnson would have none of it. And in the quarrel which followed Parton suddenly realized that his Uncle had no plans for him at all! Nothing but that Parton should stop being what he called a wastrel, living on his Uncle's money, refusing to get himself a job.

"As for me," he had said, "I wouldn't buy a peanut stand, and put you in charge of it."

. It had been a nasty quarrel, with a lot of threats . . .

But nothing that this little knife-thrust wouldn't fix! Johnson would have no chance to change his will. A single knife-thrust—and Parton would be able from his inheritance, to buy the hotel himself. He'd be owner, manager, the whole works. Marjorie would certainly be thrilled at a set-up like that . . .

The future took on glowing patterns in Parton's racing thoughts as his cold, sweating hand gripped the knife, and he stood waiting in the dim little foyer. And then his heart leaped, and started pounding like a drum.

A step had sounded outside the locked door. Johnson had returned! Parton tensed. In the heavy silence he heard his uncle's muttered complaint that the door was locked. There were impatient creakings and rattlings for an instant. Then the door opened, and Johnson came in. Crouched behind the door, Parton heard it click as it locked again.

Now for it! In the dimness Johnson's big figure was a blob, as he tossed his hat to the table and reached to switch on the room lights. But his hand never got to the switch.

Suddenly, like a pouncing animal, Parton leaped, stabbing with

the knife into Johnson's back! But the older man must have heard him, for he was able to turn. Then they were struggling . . .

It was a chaotic horror to the panting Parton—a horror in which he heard Johnson's oath, the crash of a chair going over. In blind panic, he stabbed.

As Johnson fell, with his cry only a gasping choked gurgle of blood in his throat, Parton left the knife buried to its hilt and staggered back against the wall.

The thing was done.

Johnson lay dead on the floor with the starlight bright on his upturned, vacantly staring face.

"Get out of here," a voice within Parton screamed. "Get back to the dock. Hurry!"

He darted for the corridor door but stopped abruptly, stricken with horror. The fight had aroused the hotel! Alarmed guests filled the corridor, and he couldn't get out the door.

Parton turned and ran for one of the living room windows. But all of them were screened and bolted, and there was no way of sliding the screens up. He was completely, hopelessly trapped.

People were pounding at the corridor door now, rattling and shaking the knob. In grim desperation Parton went back to the living room window. He had a big penknife in his pocket. He snapped it open and cut the screen in two long slashes, vertically and horizontally, making a cross.

Then he remembered his paddle. He shoved it through the cut screen, and it fell to the ground outside the windows. He was about to climb out and drop to the ground beside it, but he saw that he was too late. Two bellboys were dashing into view from around the distant hotel corner. They'd see him escaping!

The trap had closed again. But by some miracle Parton retained his wits. He knew what he must do, his last desperate chance. He stood at the window, and he bent the four triangular big flaps of the cut screen outward. The distant bellboys wouldn't be able to say that he hadn't climbed in from outside just a few seconds ago. Nobody could prove he hadn't.

Then Parton turned in the dim living room. He dashed for the corridor door, shouting, "He's dead! Somebody killed him—"

He flung open the door, gasping that he had heard the sounds of a struggle, and a desperate cry for help—a cry so alarming he had cut the window screen, and climbed in. The room was filled now with hotel attendants, and badly frightened guests.

"The killer must be here," gasped Parton. "I heard him."

John Rance, the big hotel detective arrived. He searched the little suite, but there was no killer to be found.

"He must have darted out into

the corridor," Parton said. "I was right under the window when I dropped my paddle, and cut the screen."

He had proof of that. He displayed his penknife. "Yeah, that's what cut the screen all right," Rance agreed. "You can see the green paint on the blade."

But how had the murderer escaped? The bellboys in the corridor had heard the struggle, but had seen no one emerge. "He didn't come out of the door," one of them said. "He sure didn't!"

"You could be mistaken," Parton said calmly. He was quite calm now, even though everybody here was gazing at him suspiciously. So what? They couldn't prove he hadn't come in the window.

Then the proof came like a bombshell. Rance was at the window, gazing at the cut screen. Suddenly he swung around. "You're a liar," he said. "You did not come in this window."

"I certainly did," Parton insisted. "I was outside. I cut the screen and climbed in."

"Did you?" Rance cried. "Did you, Parton? Come take a look at the proof that you didn't. You bent the big flaps of the cut screen inward. Sure you did! But if you'd cut it from *outside,* all the little wire prong-ends of the cut screening would have been bent *inward* with your knife-thrust. But these—"

Damnable little prongs of cut wire! His knife-slash, as he stood in the room, had bent them all outward.

"No argument, we got you," Rance was saying. And the numbed, stricken Parton could only mutter:

"Those cursed little things—I never thought of them at all."

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nine must die

by . . . C. V. Tench

Pinpricked cards pointed the way to a sanguinary path that circled half the world before trail's end.

THE MOST ASTOUNDING factor of all was from whence the corpse had come! At all times a busy thoroughfare, on this hot July afternoon the Avenue Deroulede, Paris, was teeming with traffic. A red light had halted both hurrying pedestrians and vehicles for a few moments, then the signal light had changed to green. At once a taxi driver sent his machine careening forward, then swerved the car sharply, uttering a startled shout, for there in the roadway, a few feet from the curb, lay the body of a man!

Official response had been prompt. Already a cordon of uniformed policemen were diverting vehicular traffic and restraining a clamorous mob of the morbidly curious.

Further, a police car from headquarters had immediately raced to the scene and now gathered about the dead man were Chief A. Hebert, Inspector H. Rousseau, and Detective Francois Levallois of the French Sûreté. Kneeling beside the still form, making practised examination, was Police Surgeon C. Maupert.

"You see," Dr. Maupert said in voluble French, "it is definitely murder. He was killed instantly

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by having this driven right through his heart." He exhibited a long, slender sliver of steel that looked like a knitting needle which he had extracted from the wound. "Perhaps the murderer then tried to withdraw the weapon and only the haft came away in his hand.

"But no, I am wrong!" he corrected himself hastily, looking closer at the dead man's chest. "That could not be so because, although the steel was driven into his heart with such force it went right through his clothing until even the butt end was beneath the skin, there is no bruise around the wound as there would have been had the handle of the weapon also struck him. No, I cannot say how the weapon was driven into him."

Chief Hebert nodded, asked, "And about how long has he been dead?"

"Not more than a few minutes."

"A few minutes!" Chief Hebert stared at Dr. Maupert incredulously. "But that is impossible! That suggests that he was killed right here where he fell, in full view of thousands. Yet no one admits having seen the deed committed. Why, the taxi driver swears that but a moment before there was no body lying in the roadway."

"I repeat, this man has been dead but a few minutes," Dr. Maupert insisted, getting to his feet. "Look! Blood is still oozing from the wound."

"The body might have been thrown out of a car," Inspector Rousseau suggested.

"But," Chief Hebert objected, "in that case, surely someone would have seen it. The dead man is big, heavy. It would have been no easy matter to throw him out of a car."

"Yes," Detective Levallois agreed. "Also, the body would probably have rolled, mussing up his clothing, and except where his shoulders and rump touched the asphalt his clothes are clean. That indicates the body was laid down slowly and carefully."

"You suggest, my dear Francois," Inspector Rousseau asked, "that a car stopped and two men —it would have taken two men to lift him—carried the dead man from the machine to the road? Would not stopping the death car have halted traffic? In that case, would not others have seen? Ridiculous!"

"Yet this supports Francois' theory." Chief Hebert displayed a playing card, the nine of spades, with three of the pips crudely painted to look like skulls and crossbones. On the reverse side was scrawled "Number 3."

"Remember," Chief Hebert went on, "that this card was pinned but loosely to his clothing. Had he been *thrown* from a car, it almost certainly would have become dislodged. Had he been lifted carefully from a car, then others would have seen. I do not

think solving this case will be easy. In the meantime, Doctor, please have the body taken to the mortuary for your official autopsy. I am particularly anxious to know whether or not the wound slopes downwards."

For several hours Chief Hebert sat at his desk receiving the reports of his men, each highly trained in some special branch of crime investigation. As each officer handed in his report Chief Hebert read it carefully, at the same time telling him to take a seat and wait. Now that the last man had reported Chief Hebert got to his feet and addressed them.

"So," he began, "to date we have learned this: The murdered man is Maitre Voland, a successful criminal lawyer, well known and respected in the underworld because of his cleverness in getting accused men acquitted.

"We have found out further, by a search of Maitre Voland's personal papers, that a few days ago he received through the mail a card similar to the one found pinned to his body—the nine of spades, with three of the pips crudely painted to look like skulls and crossbones, and on the other side the number three.

"In addition to the playing card, Voland received this snapshot of himself—obviously taken by a sidewalk candid cameraman—with a pinprick made through the picture right above the heart. These tokens suggest that Voland was the chosen victim of a vendetta, except for this:

"Right after lunch yesterday, Voland withdrew fifty thousand francs from the bank. Why, we do not know. But we do know that a few minutes later he was murdered, that the money was not found on his person, and that so far we have been unable to find it. From this it would appear robbery was the motive, yet *how would the killer have known several days ago,* when he sent Voland the threatening card and snapshot, *that Voland was going to withdraw fifty thousand francs from the bank yesterday?* If robbery was the only motive, then why did the murderer leave another nine of spades fastened to the corpse? That action indicates a revenge killing; that the killer wanted other potential victims to know that he was now on their trail."

For a long time no one spoke.

"Perhaps, sir," Inspector Rousseau said finally, "the motive was twofold; both robbery and revenge."

"That is possible," Chief Hebert agreed. "But as far as we have been able to discover, Voland had no enemies. In fact, in the underworld he was highly admired and respected."

"Today, perhaps," Detective Levallois put in, "but what of Voland's life before he started practising law in Paris? If we traced his life from his school-

days we might discover something."

"That is a very good suggestion, Francois," Chief Hebert commended. "Meanwhile, the newspapers must not be told about the playing cards and the photograph, otherwise an epidemic of nines of spades and pinpricked photographs from cranks and practical jokers might follow publication of the story. As far as the newspapers are concerned, then, we are completely baffled and still seeking the murderer."

Chief Hebert and his men worked quietly and steadily on the case for a week without making much progress. Now a telephone call was put through to the chief's office.

"This is Rousseau, sir," said the voice over the wire. "I'm calling from Clichy Station. Please come out here at once. We've just found another body!"

Together with Detective Levallois, Chief Hebert drove swiftly to the scene. Inspector Rousseau was awaiting them, standing beside a huddled body.

"This man was also killed by having a steel needle driven into his heart," Rousseau explained. "And, like Voland, his corpse seemed to drop from nowhere. Nothing lying in the roadway one minute, the next—a murdered man."

"Who is he?" Chief Hebert asked. "What have you found out?"

"He is Robert Jaubard, a railway track laborer, well known locally," Rousseau replied. "These men are housed in company huts; you can see them from here. By interrogating Jaubard's fellow workers I have learned this:

"A few days ago Jaubard found this picture of himself pinned over his bunk." Rousseau handed Chief Hebert a small snapshot. "You'll notice, sir, the pinprick through the heart and a skull and crossbones with the number four on the back. Jaubard thought it the work of a practical joker, laughingly told others about it and showed them the photograph. And pinned to Jaubard's body was this." Rousseau held out a playing card. "The same nine of spades, sir, but this time with four of the pips altered to look like skulls and crossbones and number four on the back."

Chief Hebert grunted as he studied the card and the photograph. "It certainly seems like some form of vendetta, but the victims were so far apart as regards their stations in life—a successful lawyer and a humble laborer. No connection at all, apparently."

"Excepting, sir," put in Levallois, who had been examining the dead man, "their age. This man would have been in his fifties, as was Voland."

Chief Hebert looked closer at the body. "Yes, Francois, there is that similarity. If these are

revenge killings then the motive must go back to the youths of victims and killer. As with Voland, we must delve into this man's early history."

"But, sir," Rousseau said, "as in Voland's case, there was also robbery this time. Only this morning this poor devil had a bit of luck; won five thousand francs in a sweepstake. He had been celebrating all day, treating all his friends and acquaintances. Less than an hour ago he hailed a taxi and, poking his head out of a window as he drove away, shouted to all and sundry that he was going to visit a woman friend. Then, minutes later he was found lying here, dead, and there is not one sou on his person. So, sir, perhaps it is not vendetta. It might be a gang of robbers who use the photographs and skulls and crossbones business to confuse us. I am almost convinced it is an organized gang."

"You are wrong, my dear Rouseau," Chief Hebert said. "You forget that the photographs and playing cards were sent to both victims some days before they were executed. Could ordinary robbers *have known beforehand* that Voland was going to withdraw fifty thousand francs from the bank on a certain day, or that today this poor laborer was going to win a lottery prize? No. I believe both men were killed for revenge, but the killer timed matters so as to get some money, too. In fact—Ah, here is Doctor Maupert . . ."

For a second time Dr. Maupert had extracted a sliver of steel from the heart of a murdered man.

"As with Voland," he said as he handed the missile to Chief Hebert, "the wound slopes downward. But the heavy work clothing this man is wearing prevented the steel penetrating as deeply as in the other case."

"Ah!" Chief Hebert commented. "That supports my belief that these needles are fired from some sort of an air gun. Had he been stabbed the steel would have gone in to the hilt. Well there is nothing further we can do here, so you take charge of the remains, Doctor."

Just after six o'clock on the following Sunday morning, Chief Hebert was awakened by the insistent shrilling of the telephone. Grumbling at being disturbed so early on what should have been his day of rest, he pulled on slippers and robe and made his way downstairs. The moment he lifted the receiver his weariness vanished.

"Warden Colbert calling from the Louys Gaol," the voice said. "A man has just been murdered right outside the prison gates! Come at once!"

In less than an hour, and for the third time in two weeks, Chief Hebert, Inspector Rousseau, Detective Levallois and Doctor Mau-

pert gathered about the limp form of a man who had been killed by a long steel needle driven into his heart.

Warden Colbert tersely explained.

"Barely an hour ago this man, Pierre Delagrange, was released at the termination of his sentence. He was freed at five o'clock because he wished to catch an early train to Avignon. Warder Dupont, on duty at the main gate, saw Delagrange get into a taxi that happened along and heard him tell the driver to take him to the railway station. When Dupont again opened the gate less than an hour later, to let out two other warders going off duty, the three of them were startled to see Delagrange's body lying here. This was pinned to his clothing."

Warden Colbert handed Chief Hebert a card.

It was another nine of spades, but this time five of the pips had been crudely changed to look like skulls and crossbones and number five was scrawled on the back.

"Mon Dieu!" Chief Hebert breathed. "But the murderer must have watched his victims very closely. He must have found out the exact time this man was going to be released. And this card indicates he has yet four more potential victims." He stared hard at the corpse in the muddy roadway. "Delagrange was in his fifties. Their age is the only apparent connection between the three victims—a lawyer, a laborer, and now an ex-convict."

"And again the missile was driven downwards," Dr. Maupert said, getting to his feet, and holding up another of the deadly needles to Chief Hebert.

"Yes, the killer is definitely a man of method," Chief Hebert commented as he wrapped the sliver of steel in a handkerchief. "These killings have been so carefully planned and executed that I am now convinced this is a case of vendetta. And unless from now on we work fast, four more men may be killed."

Next morning when Chief Hebert summoned all officers working on the case to his office he was grimly jubilant. His desk was covered with papers.

"I am now able to state," he said, "that your painstaking work is at last showing results. We are close to solving the steel pin killings. But I warn you, even now, *when I know his name,* it will take our combined ingenuity to trap the killer. I shall explain at length and in detail. As I talk I shall refer to these reports and cables on my desk.

"The fact that all three victims were warned beforehand and the use of the nine of spades, convinced me that the murders were vendetta killings, for, as you all know, the ace of spades is a typical Corsican vendetta sign. Use of the *nine* of spades indicates nine victims and potential

victims. Since he has killed only three in Paris, with four to go, these figures suggested that he killed two before coming here. This I have confirmed; they were killed outside of France, before he murdered Voland.

"But even accepting the killings as being prompted by a personal desire for vengeance did not reconcile the wide difference in the three victims' stations in life—a lawyer, a laborer, a criminal. Yet I felt convinced that at some time—most likely in their youth—the killer and his victims had associated with one another on more or less equal terms.

"I asked myself: 'What is the great levelling force that would put men from all stations in life on equal terms?' The army, of course!

"I at once followed that up, and learned that in his youth Voland served in the army at Sidi bel Abbes in Africa. I requested full investigation and learned that Voland was a lieutenant. One of the men in his platoon was a private named Jean Pegoud. Pegoud's life was ruined by a selfish and diabolical plot conceived by Voland, assisted by eight others. When you hear the details of this plot you will feel no sympathy for Pegoud's victims.

"While serving in Africa, Pegoud legally married, as is permitted by regulations, a beautiful young Eurasian girl. Voland saw the girl, desired her for himself, and arranged to have Pegoud arrested and charged with the murder of an Arab Shiekh. Actually, our army secret service men never did find out for sure who killed the Arab. But having private means, Voland bribed no less than eight men of his platoon to bear false witness against Pegoud.

"The chief witness was a Sergeant Moreau who swore that he saw Pegoud stealing away from the Shiekh's abode on the night the Arab was murdered. In consequence, Pegoud was convicted and sentenced to serve ten years in a convict battalion. You all know what that means—a living death, far worse than being shot.

"But Pegoud never served his sentence. That very night he contrived to escape, perhaps aided by sympathetic comrades, taking his young wife with him. All the next day they hid in an abandoned blockhouse.

"Of course an intensive search was made, but, likely knowing where he was hiding, none of the hunters went near the blockhouse excepting Sergeant Moreau and another man who had also borne false witness against Pegoud. Despite the fact they were armed and he was not, Pegoud fought with them. During the bitter fight Pegoud was badly slashed by their swords, losing two fingers from his right hand and the thumb from his left.

"Yet—and it is all here in detail"—Chief Hebert touched the

papers on his desk—"Pegoud managed to overpower Moreau and the other soldier. He then tied them up hand and foot and wreaked upon them a terrible revenge. Instead of killing his two captives with their own swords, Pegoud and his wife gathered together more than a score of black scorpions, the most deadly insect in Africa, and threw them on their prisoners!

"When the agonized screams of the two men were at last heard, bringing others to the scene, both were dying in frightful pain. But before he died Moreau managed to gasp out what had taken place.

"Eventually, Pegoud and his wife were traced. Pegoud had turned Moslem and he and his wife were living with a tribe of Touaregs. That meant that the whole tribe would fight to prevent French troops from taking Pegoud prisoner. Since the policy of our government is to remain on peaceful terms with the natives the matter was allowed to rest.

"And now, according to army secret service men, some months ago Pegoud's wife died and it was believed that he had returned to France. Obviously he is now here in Paris, most likely living under an assumed name. Further, as all this took place some thirty years ago, Pegoud and the ones who wronged him would now be in their fifties." Chief Hebert paused, ended significantly: "So it all fits in, for the three victims were in their fifties."

"The other four men who bore false witness against Pegoud, are they still living, sir?" Rousseau asked.

"Yes." Chief Hebert consulted a report on his desk. "But only one of them is living in Paris. We traced this man, whose name is Henri Laval, and learned that through the mail he has already received a snapshot of himself, with a pinprick through the heart, and a nine of spades with this time six of the pips changed to look like skulls and crossbones and number six on the back. But, as we have kept all news of these cards from being published, Laval thought it the work of some practical joker, paid no attention to the warning." Chief Hebert smiled grimly. "When we told him of their real significance he almost collapsed and pleaded for police protection.

"Laval operates a small shop and two of our men are now stationed there as bodyguards. Laval has been warned not to move outside his shop until Pegoud has been captured. I am sure that he will heed that warning."

"Voila!" Detective Levallois exclaimed. "But Pegoud is very thorough and very sure of himself, eh?"

"And why not?" Chief Hebert asked. "He has a means of killing his victims that leaves us no clue

to go on. But I did find out that in his youth Pegoud was a very clever mechanic. The laborer and the convict were both seen to enter a taxi just before being found dead. And although nobody actually saw it being done, it is fairly obvious that all three bodies were dropped to the roadway from a car. Combining those points suggests this:

"Being a clever mechanic by training and natural aptitude, Pegoud is probably operating a taxi. That would also give him good excuse for keeping his mutilated hands gloved, and his car could be used as a trap, eh?

"And we shall likely learn that his car is some sort of a diabolical execution chamber on wheels. I think we shall find that the steel needles are shot from some kind of a gun of his own invention."

"Then what—" Levallois began.

"I have thought of a plan," Chief Hebert interrupted. "Instead of forcing our man into hiding I hope my plan will bring him out into the open. But, Francois, my plan involves placing *your* life in grave danger."

"I have taken oath to give my life, if necessary, in the execution of my duty," Levallois said quietly. "What, sir, is your plan?"

Everyone sat tense as, leaning forward, Chief Hebert explained.

"You, Francois, are about Laval's height and build. I want you to go to Laval's shop, dress yourself in some of his clothes and, as nearly as possible, make yourself up to look like him. After dark, you are to emerge from the shop and stand on the edge of the curb as if looking for a taxi. I am confident that a taxi will soon draw alongside. Rousseau, myself and others will be close by in cars. When the taxi moves away we shall follow. As soon as you are certain that the driver is Pegoud you are to signal from the rear window and we shall immediately close in and effect his arrest."

"But how shall I know, sir?" Levallois asked. "Have you some idea what Pegoud now looks like?"

"Yes." Chief Hebert picked up a paper from his desk. "He is a heavy, powerfully built man. He no doubt wears heavy gloves, but you will be able to see whether or not his hands are mutilated. Further, after spending long years on the sands of North Africa his skin is no doubt burned to mahogany and his eyes would be pale and sun-washed. Most likely he wears a beard. Be very vigilant, for I believe he kills his victims almost as soon as they are seated in his car."

"Then he could shoot me long before you had a chance to help me," Levallois pointed out dubiously. "Shall I have no other protection?"

"You will have your gun," Chief Hebert said, "and you must not hesitate about using it.

Further, I order you to wear one of our bullet-proof vests."

For more than an hour Levallois stayed in the back of Henri Laval's shop. Laval himself stood close to him but hidden from the view of anyone glancing through the window. Levallois' make-up was almost perfect; his resemblance to the shopkeeper life-like.

"Look!" Laval whispered tremulously. "There he is again!"

A powerful car was gliding slowly past, a bearded and goggled figure at the wheel.

"I don't know how many times he has passed and re-passed my shop lately," Laval whispered. "He is like a tiger stalking its prey."

Taking one more look at his revolver to make certain that it was in good order, Levallois slipped the weapon back into a pocket of his light overcoat and strolled from the building.

Pegoud's car was just turning at the corner. Hurrying across the road Levallois held up his hand just as the machine came rolling along close to the curb.

As the car stopped Levallois caught a glimpse of fierce, pale eyes. Ordering the man to drive leisurely through the Bois de Boulogue, Levallois climbed into the rear seat. The driver nodded and slammed shut the rear door.

Like most Parisian taxi cabs, a glass partition separated the driver from his passengers, a speaking tube permitting verbal contact.

As the car purred quietly through the brightly lighted Avenue de Bois Levallois studied the driver closely through the glass partition, particularly noting his gloved hands. Despite the leather gloves he could see plainly that two fingers were missing from the right hand and the thumb from the left. Undoubtedly this was Pegoud!

Then Levallois received a shock. Suddenly the driver removed his goggles and Levallois met the full evil glare of Pegoud's eyes reflected by a convex mirror. Levallois then noted that there was something unusual about all of the instruments and dials on the dashboard and steering wheel.

On the wheel itself was a tubular lens with circles and markings similar to a gunsight, and within easy reach of the driver's hands were a number of switches. Presently Levallois saw Pegoud touch one and immediately the speaking tube moved silently until it pointed full at Levallois' chest.

Then Levallois saw that the tube was solid excepting for a small hole in the center; a hole just above the size of the bore of the steel missiles which had already killed three men in Paris. Chief Hebert had surmised that the steel needles were fired from some kind of an air gun. Evidently the speaking tube was the murder weapon!

Levallois felt his nerves tightening, the hair on the back of his neck crawling. He had seen enough. He turned to signal to the police cars following—and found that a steel shutter had dropped silently over the rear window! Chief Hebert had spoken truly when he said Pegoud's taxi was a diabolical execution chamber on wheels!

Levallois took a steadying breath and with his right hand started to draw his revolver from his pocket, at the same time raising his left hand to knock upon the glass partition. As Pegoud turned his head in answer to the signal Levallois would cover him with the gun and order him to pull to the curb and stop.

Levallois was a moment too late. There came a sharp *plop,* the gleam of flashing steel and something struck him a vicious blow just above the heart! One of the deadly steel needles had driven through his clothing and, but for the bullet-proof vest, would have killed him.

Killed him! Levallois remembered that he was playing the part of bait for the trap. Uttering a choked cry, he slumped back with contorted face and writhing limbs, supposedly a dying man. Under half-closed lids he saw that Pegoud was staring gloatingly at his reflection in the convex mirror.

Levallois fully expected Pegoud would now stop the car, examine him to see if he were dead and pin to his clothing a nine of spades. His right hand closed firmly about his pistol. But instead the car suddenly accelerated and a moment later the rear seat suddenly slipped from under Levallois, the cushions pressed forward and down and he found himself crushed tightly between narrow walls. Followed a slam above his head, the spang of a powerful spring snapping back into place, and he realized that he was a helpless prisoner, roughly crowded into what was originally the luggage compartment, now ingeniously transformed into a mobile steel coffin!

Realizing that he could not long retain consciousness in such a constricted attitude, Levallois strained to grip and drag free his revolver. He would empty the weapon regardless of where the bullets went, in the forlorn hope that the reports would attract the attention of others.

Then the taxi suddenly slowed and Levallois felt the steel floor slide from under him. The next moment he dropped to the hard roadway, rolled over and lay still, half-stunned and breathless.

As in a dream he heard cars racing past him, brakes scream, the roar of shots, screams and excited cries. Presently there came the sound of hurrying footsteps and Rousseau's voice.

"Mon Dieu! Francois is dead! We were too slow!"

As Rousseau, Chief Hebert and others gathered around him anxiously, Levallois opened his eyes. "No," he gasped, "I'm not dead, but for the love of heaven, bring me a cognac before I pass out!"

Later, back at headquarters, Levallois recounted his harrowing experience in detail.

"Mon Dieu!" Chief Hebert exclaimed. "My poor Francois! What an ordeal. But thanks to your magnificent courage and presence of mind, we trapped Pegoud."

"But why didn't you capture him sooner?" Levallois asked.

"Ah!" Chief Hebert nodded. "You have the right to ask. You see, not knowing that the rear window was covered by a steel shutter we were awaiting your signal. When it did not come after long anxious minutes we started to close in, and at once Pegoud accelerated as you'll recall. Dense traffic at an intersection then compelled him to slow down and he dropped you in the roadway. Before he could again speed up we surrounded him."

Levallois said, "And we have ample evidence to convict him, eh?"

Chief Hebert shook his head slowly. "No. Although vastly outnumbered, Pegoud fought like a wild beast. I regret that we had to use our guns. Jean Pegoud is dead!"

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